SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

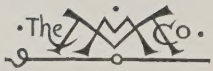
MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/sirgeorgetressad0000hump

SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

VOL. I.


The
Co

SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR OF "MARCELLA," "THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE," "ROBERT ELSMERE," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

1896

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1895,
By MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

Copyright, 1896,
By MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

To my Brother and Friend

WILLIAM THOMAS ARNOLD

I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

PART I

SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

CHAPTER I

"Well, that's over, thank Heaven!"

The young man speaking drew in his head from the carriage-window. But instead of sitting down he turned with a joyous, excited gesture and lifted the flap over the little window in the back of the landau, supporting himself, as he stooped to look, by a hand on his companion's shoulder. Through this peephole he saw, as the horses trotted away, the crowd in the main street of Market Malford, still huzzaing and waving, the wild glare of half a dozen torches on the faces and the moving forms, the closed shops on either hand, the irregular roofs and chimneys sharp-cut against a wintry sky, and in the far distance the little lantern belfry and taller mass of the new town-hall.

"I'm much astonished the horses didn't bolt!" said the man addressed. "That bay mare would have lost all the temper she's got in another moment. It's a good thing we made them shut the carriage — it has turned abominably cold. Hadn't you better sit down?"

And Lord Fontenoy made a movement as though to withdraw from the hand on his shoulder.

The owner of the hand flung himself down on the seat, with a word of apology, took off his hat, and drew a long breath of fatigue. At the same moment a sudden look of disgust effaced the smile with which he had taken his last glimpse at the crowd.

"All very well!—but what one wants after this business is *a moral tub!* The lies I've told during the last three weeks—the bunkum I've talked!—it's a feeling of positive dirt! And the worst of it is, however you may scrub your mind afterwards, some of it must stick."

He took out a cigarette, and lit it at his companion's with a rather unsteady hand. He had a thin, long face and fair hair; and one would have guessed him some ten years younger than the man beside him.

"Certainly—it will stick," said the other. "Election promises nowadays are sharply looked after. I heard no bunkum. As far as I know, our party doesn't talk any. We leave that to the Government!"

Sir George Tressady, the young man addressed, shrugged his shoulders. His mouth was still twitching under the influence of nervous excitement. But as they rolled along between the dark hedges, the carriage-lamps shining on their wet branches, green yet, in spite of November, he began to recover a half-cynical self-control. The poll for the Market Malford Division of West Mercia had been declared that afternoon, between two and three o'clock, after a hotly contested election; he, as the successful candidate by a very narrow majority, had since addressed a shouting mob from the balcony of the Greyhound Hotel, had suffered the usual taking out of horses and tri-

umphal dragging through the town, and was now returning with his supporter and party-leader, Lord Fontenoy, to the great Tory mansion which had sent them forth in the morning, and had been Tressady's headquarters during the greater part of the fight.

"Did you ever see anyone so down as Burrows?" he said presently, with a little leap of laughter. "By George! it *is* hard lines. I suppose he thought himself safe, what with the work he'd done in the division and the hold he had on the miners. Then a confounded stranger turns up, and the chance of seventeen ignorant voters kicks you out! He could hardly bring himself to shake hands with me. I had come rather to admire him, hadn't you?"

Lord Fontenoy nodded.

"I thought his speeches showed ability," he said indifferently, "only of a kind that must be kept out of Parliament — that's all. Sorry you have qualms — quite unnecessary, I assure you! At the present moment, either Burrows and his like knock under, or you and your like. This time — by seventeen votes — Burrows knocks under. Thank the Lord! say I" — and the speaker opened the window an instant to knock off the end of his cigar.

Tressady made no reply. But again a look, half-chagrined, half-reflective, puckered his brow, which was smooth, white, and boyish under his straight, fair hair; whereas the rest of the face was subtly lined, and browned as though by travel and varied living. The nose and mouth, though not handsome, were small and delicately cut, while the long, pointed chin, slightly protruding, made those who disliked

him say that h" was like those innumerable portraits of Philip IV., by and after Velasquez, which bestrew the collections of Europe. But if the Hapsburg chin had to be admitted, nothing could be more modern, intelligent, alert, than the rest of him.

The two rolled along a while in silence. They were passing through an undulating midland country, dimly seen under the stars. At frequent intervals rose high mounds, with tall chimneys and huddled buildings beside them or upon them which marked the sites of collieries; while the lights also, which had begun to twinkle over the face of the land, showed that it was thickly inhabited.

Suddenly the carriage rattled into a village, and Tressady looked out.

"I say, Fontenoy, here's a crowd! Do you suppose they know? Why, Gregson's taken us another way round!"

Lord Fontenoy let down his window, and identified the small mining village of Battage.

"Why did you bring us this way, Gregson?" he said to the coachman.

The man, a Londoner, turned, and spoke in a low voice. "I thought we might find some rioting going on in Marraby, my lord. And now I see there's lots o' them out here!"

Indeed, with the words he had to check his horses. The village street was full from end to end with miners just come up from work. Fontenoy at once perceived that the news of the election had arrived. The men were massed in large groups, talking and

discussing, with evident and angry excitement, and as soon as the well-known liveries on the box of the new member's carriage were identified there was an instant rush towards it. Some of the men had already gone into their houses on either hand, but at the sound of the wheels and the uproar they came rushing out again. A howling hubbub arose, a confused sound of booing and groaning, and the carriage was soon surrounded by grimed men, gesticulating and shouting.

"Yer bloated parasites, yer!" cried a young fellow, catching at the door-handle on Lord Fontenoy's side; "we'll make a d——d end o' yer afore we've done wi' yer. Who asked yer to come meddlin in Malford — d——n yer!"

"Whativer do we want wi' the loikes o' yo representin us!" shouted another man, pointing at Tressady. "Look at 'im; ee can't walk, ee can't; mus be druv, poor himnercent! When did yo iver do a day's work, eh? Look at my 'ands! Them's the 'ands for honest men — ain't they, you fellers?"

There was a roar of laughter and approval from the crowd, and up went a forest of begrimed hands, flourishing and waving.

George calmly put down the carriage-window, and, leaning his arms upon it, put his head out. He flung some good-humoured banter at some of the nearest men, and two or three responded. But the majority of the faces were lowering and fierce, and the horses were becoming inconveniently crowded.

"Get on, Gregson," said Fontenoy, opening the front window of the brougham.

"If they'll let me, your lordship," said Gregson, rather pale, raising his whip.

The horses made a sudden start forward. There was a yell from the crowd, and three or four men had just dashed for the horses' heads, when a shout of a different kind ascended.

"Burrows! 'Ere's Burrows! Three cheers for Burrows!"

And some distance behind them, at the corner of the village street, Tressady suddenly perceived a tall dogcart drawing up with two men in it. It was already surrounded by a cheering and tumultuous assembly, and one of the men in the cart was shaking hands right and left.

George drew in his head, with a laugh. "This is dramatic. They've stopped the horses, and here's Burrows!"

Fontenoy shrugged his shoulders. "They'll blackguard us a bit, I suppose, and let us go. Burrows 'll keep them in order."

"What d'yer mean by it, heh, dash yer!" shouted a huge man, as he sprang on the step of the carriage and shook a black fist in Tressady's face — "thrustin yer d——d carkiss where yer ain't wanted? We wanted '*im*, and we've worked for 'im. This is a workin-class district, an we've a *right* to 'im. Do yer 'ear?"

"Then you should have given him seventeen more votes," said George, composedly, as he thrust his hands into his pockets. "It's the fortunes of war — your turn next time. I say, suppose you tell your fellows to let our man get on. We've had a

long day, and we're hungry. Ah"—to Fontenoy—"here's Burrows coming!"

Fontenoy turned, and saw that the dogcart had drawn up alongside them, and that one of the men was standing on the step of it, holding on to the rail of the cart.

He was a tall, finely built man, and as he looked down on the carriage, and on Tressady leaning over the window, the light from a street-lamp near showed a handsome face blanched with excitement and fatigue.

"Now, my friends," he said, raising his arm, and addressing the crowd, "you let Sir George go home to his dinner. He's beaten us, and so far as I know *he's* fought fair, whatever some of his friends may have done for him. I'm going home to have a bite of something and a wash. I'm done. But if any of you like to come round to the club—eight o'clock—I'll tell you a thing or two about this election. Now good-night to you, Sir George. We'll beat you yet, trust us. Fall back there!"

He pointed peremptorily to the men holding the horses. They and the crowd instantly obeyed him.

The carriage swept on, followed by the hooting and groans of the whole community, men, women, and children, who were now massed along the street on either hand.

"It's easy to see this man Gregson's a new hand," said Fontenoy, with an accent of annoyance, as they got clear of the village. "I believe the Wattons have only just imported him, otherwise he'd never have avoided Marraby, and come round by Battage."

"Battage has some special connection with Burrows, hasn't it? I had forgotten."

"Of course. He was check-weigher at the Acme pit here for years, before they made him district secretary of the union."

"That's why they gave me such a hot meeting here a fortnight ago! — I remember now; but one thing drives another out of one's head. Well, I daresay you and I'll have plenty more to do with Burrows before we've done."

Tressady threw himself back in his corner with a yawn.

Fontenoy laughed.

"There'll be another big strike some time next year," he said drily — "bound to be, as far as I can see. We shall all have plenty to do with Burrows then."

"All right," said Tressady, indistinctly, pulling his hat over his eyes. "Burrows or anybody else may blow me up next year, so long as they let me go to sleep now."

However, he did not find it so easy to go to sleep. His pulses were still tingling under the emotions of the day and the stimulus of the hubbub they had just passed through. His mind raced backwards and forwards over the incidents and excitements of the last six months, over the scenes of his canvass — and over some other scenes of a different kind which had taken place in the country-house whither he and Fontenoy were returning.

But he did his best to feign sleep. His one desire was that Fontenoy should not talk to him. Fontenoy,

however, was not easily taken in, and no sooner did George make his first restless movement under the rug he had drawn over him, than his companion broke silence.

"By the way, what did you think of that memorandum of mine on Maxwell's bill?"

George fidgeted and mumbled. Fontenoy, undaunted, began to harangue on certain minutiæ of factory law with a monotonous zest of voice and gesture which seemed to Tressady nothing short of amazing.

He watched the speaker a minute or two through his half-shut eyes. So this was his leader to be — the man who had made him member for Market Malford.

Eight years before, when George Tressady had first entered Christchurch, he had found that place of tempered learning alive with traditions on the subject of "Dicky Fontenoy." And such traditions — good Heavens! Subsequently, at most race-meetings, large and small, and at various clubs, theatres, and places of public resort, the younger man had had his opportunities of observing the elder, and had used them always with relish, and sometimes with admiration. He himself had no desire to follow in Fontenoy's footsteps. Other elements ruled in him, which drew him other ways. But there was a magnificence about the impetuosity, or rather the doggedness with which Fontenoy had plunged into the business of ruining himself, which stirred the imagination. On the last occasion, some three and a half years before this Market Malford election, when Tressady had seen

Fontenoy before starting himself on a long Eastern tour, he had been conscious of a lively curiosity as to what might have happened to "Dicky" by the time he came back again. The eldest sons of peers do not generally come to the workhouse; but there are aristocratic substitutes which, relatively, are not much less disagreeable; and George hardly saw how they were to be escaped.

And now — not four years! — and here sat Dicky Fontenoy, haranguing on the dull clauses of a technical act, throat hoarse with the speaking of the last three weeks, eyes cavernous with anxiety and overwork, the creator and leader of a political party which did not exist when Tressady left England, and now bade fair to hold the balance of power in English government! The surprises of fate and character! Tressady pondered them a little in a sleepy way; but the fatigue of many days asserted itself. Even his companion was soon obliged to give him up as a listener. Lord Fontenoy ceased to talk; yet every now and then, as some jolt of the carriage made George open his eyes, he saw the broad-shouldered figure beside him, sitting in the same attitude, erect and tireless, the same half-peevish pugnacity giving expression to mouth and eye.

"Come, wake up, Tressady! Here we are!"

There was a vindictive eagerness in Fontenoy's voice. Ease was no longer welcome to him, whether in himself or as a spectacle in other men. George, startled from a momentary profundity of sleep, staggered to his feet, and clutched at various bags and rugs.

The carriage was standing under the pillared porch of Malford House, and the great house-doors, thrown back upon an inner flight of marble steps, gave passage to a blaze of light. George, descending, had just shaken himself awake, and handed the things he held to a footman, when there was a sudden uproar from within. A crowd of figures — men and women, the men cheering, the women clapping and laughing — ran down the inner steps towards him. He was surrounded, embraced, slapped on the back, and finally carried triumphantly into the hall.

"Bring him in!" said an exultant voice; "and stand back, please, and let his mother get at him."

The laughing group fell back, and George, blinking, radiant, and abashed, found himself in the arms of an exceedingly sprightly and youthful dame, with pale, frizzled hair, and the figure of seventeen.

"Oh, you dear, great, foolish thing!" said the lady, with the voice and the fervour, moreover, of seventeen. "So you've got in — you've done it! Well, I should never have spoken to you again if you hadn't! And I suppose you'd have minded that a little — from your own mother. Goodness! how cold he is!"

And she flew at him with little pecking kisses, retreating every now and again to look at him, and then closing upon him again in ecstasy, till George, at the end of his patience, held her off with a strong arm.

"Now, mother, that's enough. Have the others been home long?" he asked, addressing a smiling young man in knickerbockers who, with his hands in his pockets, was standing beside the hero of the occasion surveying the scene.

"Oh! about half an hour. They reported you'd have some difficulty in getting out of the clutches of the crowd. We hardly expected you so soon."

"How's Miss Sewell's headache? Does she know?"

The expression of the young man's eye, which was bent on Tressady, changed ever so slightly as he replied:

"Oh yes, she knows. As soon as the others got back Mrs. Watton went up to tell her. She didn't show at lunch."

"Mrs. Watton came to tell *me* — naughty man!" said the lady whom George had addressed as his mother, tapping the speaker on the arm with her fan. "Mothers first, if you please, especially when they're cripples like me, and can't go and see their dear darlings' triumphs with their own eyes. And *I* told Miss Sewell."

She put her head on one side, and looked archly at her son. Her high gown, a work of the most approved Parisian art, was so cut as to show much more throat than usual, and, in addition, a row of very fine pearls. Her very elegant waist and bust were defined by a sort of Empire sash; her complexion did her maid and, indeed, her years, infinite credit.

George flushed slightly at his mother's words, and was turning away from her when he was gripped by the owner of the house, Squire Watton, an eloquent and soft-hearted old gentleman who, having in George's opinion already overdone it greatly at the town-hall in the way of hand-shaking and congratulations, was now most unreasonably prepared to overdo it again. Lady Tressady joined in with little shrieks and sallies, the other guests of the house

gathered round, and the hero of the day was once more lost to sight and hearing amid the general hubbub of talk and laughter — for the young man in knickerbockers, at any rate, who stood a little way off from the rest.

"I wonder when she'll condescend to come down," he said to himself, examining his boots with a speculative smile. "Of course it was mere caprice that she didn't go to Malford; she meant it to annoy."

"I say, do let me get warm," said Tressady at last, breaking from his tormentors, and coming up to the open log fire, in front of which the young man stood. "Where's Fontenoy vanished to?"

"Went up to write letters directly he had swallowed a cup of tea," said the young man, whose name was Bayle; "and called Marks to go with him." (Marks was Lord Fontenoy's private secretary.)

George Tressady threw up his hands in disgust.

"It's absurd. He never allows himself an hour's peace. If he expects me to grind as he does, he'll soon regret that he lent a hand to put me into Parliament. Well, I'm stiff all over, and as tired as a rat. I'll go and have a warm bath before dinner."

But still he lingered, warming his hands over the blaze, and every now and then scanning the gallery which ran round the big hall. Bayle chatted to him about some of the incidents of the day. George answered at random. He did, indeed, look tired out, and his expression was restless and discontented.

Suddenly there was a cry from the group of young men and maidens who were amusing themselves in the centre of the hall.

"Why, there's Letty! and as fresh as paint."

George turned abruptly. Bayle saw his manner stiffen and his eye kindle.

A young girl was slowly coming down the great staircase which led to the hall. She was in a soft black dress with a blue sash, and a knot of blue at her throat — a childish slip of a dress, which answered to her small rounded form, her curly head, and the hand slipping along the marble rail. She came down silently smiling, taking each step with great deliberation, in spite of the outbreak of half-derisive sympathy with which she was greeted from her friends below. Her bright eyes glanced from face to face — from the mocking inquirers immediately beneath her to George Tressady standing by the fire.

At the moment when she reached the last step Tressady found it necessary to put another log on a fire already piled to repletion.

Meanwhile Miss Sewell went straight towards the new member and held out her hand.

"I am so glad, Sir George; let me congratulate you."

George put down his log, and then looked at his fingers critically.

"I am very sorry, Miss Sewell, but I am not fit to touch. I hope your headache is better."

Miss Sewell dropped her hand meekly, shot him a glance which was not meek, and said demurely:

"Oh! my headaches do what they're told. You see, I was determined to come down and congratulate you."

"I see," he repeated, making her a little bow. "I hope my ailments, when I get them, will be as docile. So my mother told you?"

"I didn't want telling," she said placidly. "I knew it was all safe."

"Then you knew what only the gods knew — for I only got in by seventeen votes."

"Yes, so I heard. I was very sorry for Burrows."

She put one foot on the stone fender, raised her pretty dress with one hand, and leant the other lightly against the mantelpiece. The attitude was full of grace, and the little sighing voice fitted the curves of a mouth which seemed always ready to laugh, yet seldom laughed frankly.

As she made her remark about Burrows Tressady smiled.

"My prophetic soul was right," he said deliberately; "I knew you would be sorry for Burrows."

"Well, it *is* hard on him, isn't it? You can't deny you're a carpet-bagger, can you?"

"Why should I? I'm proud of it."

Then he looked round him. The rest of the party — not without whispers and smothered laughter — had withdrawn from them. Some of the ladies had already gone up to dress. The men had wandered away into a little library and smoking-room which opened on the hall. Only the squire, safe in a capacious armchair a little way off, was absorbed in a local paper and the last humours of the election.

Satisfied with his glance, Tressady put his hands into his pockets, and leant back against the fireplace, in a way to give himself fuller command of Miss Sewell's countenance.

"Do you never give your friends any better sym-

pathy than you have given me in this affair, Miss Sewell?" he said suddenly, as their eyes met.

She made a little face.

"Why, I've been an angel!" she said, poking at a prominent log with her foot.

George laughed.

"Then our ideas of angels agree no better than the rest. Why didn't you come and hear the poll declared, after promising me you would be there?"

"Because I had a headache, Sir George."

He responded with a little inclination, as though ceremoniously accepting her statement.

"May I ask at what time your headache began?"

"Let me see," she said, laughing; "I think it was directly after breakfast."

"Yes. It declared itself, if I remember right, immediately after certain remarks of mine about a Captain Addison?"

He looked straight before him, with a detached air.

"Yes," said Letty, thoughtfully; "it was a curious coincidence, wasn't it?"

There was a moment's silence. Then she broke into infectious laughter.

"Don't you know," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder — "don't you know that you're a most foolish and wasteful person? We get along capitally, you and I — we've had a rattling time all this week — and then you will go and make uncivil remarks about my friends — in public, too! You actually think I'm going to let you tell Aunt Watton how to manage me! You get me into no end of a fuss — it'll take me weeks to undo the mischief you've been making — and then

you expect me to take it like a lamb! Now, do I look like a lamb?"

All this time she was holding him tight by the arm, and her dimpled face, alive with mirth and malice, was so close to his that a moment's wild impulse flashed through him to kiss her there and then. But the impulse passed. He and Letty Sewell had known each other for about three weeks. They were not engaged — far from it. And these — the hand on the arm, and the rest — were Letty Sewell's ways.

Instead of kissing her, then, he scanned her deliberately.

"I never saw anyone more plainly given over to obstinacy and pride," he said quietly; "I told you some plain facts about the character of a man whom I know, and you don't, whereupon you sulk all day, you break all your promises about coming to Malford, and when I come back you call me names."

She raised her eyebrows and withdrew her hand.

"Well, it's plain, isn't it? that I must have been in a great rage. It was very dull upstairs, though I did write reams to my best friend all about you — a very candid account — I shall have to soften it down. By the way, are you ever going to dress for dinner?"

George started, and looked at his watch.

"Are we alone? Is anyone coming from outside?"

"Only a few 'locals,' just to celebrate the occasion. I know the clergyman's wife's coming, for she told me she had been copying one of my frocks, and wanted me to tell her what I thought."

George laughed.

"Poor lady!"

"I don't *think* I shall be nice to her," said Letty, playing with a flower on the mantelpiece. "Dowdy people make me feel wicked. Well, *I* must dress."

It was now his turn to lay a detaining hand.

"Are you sorry?" he said, bending over to her. His bright grey eyes had shaken off fatigue.

"For what? Because you got in?"

Her face overflowed with laughter. He let her go. She linked her arm in that of the daughter of the house — Miss Florence Watton — who was crossing the hall at the moment, and the two went upstairs together, she throwing back one triumphant glance at him from the landing.

George stood watching them till they disappeared. His expression was neither soft nor angry. There was in it a mocking self-possession which showed that he too had been playing a part — mingled, perhaps, with a certain perplexity.

CHAPTER II

George Tressady came down very late for dinner, and found his hostess on the verge of annoyance. Mrs. Watton was a large, commanding woman, who seldom thought it worth while to disguise any disapproval she might feel — and she had a great deal of that commodity to expend, both on persons and institutions.

George hastened to propitiate her with the usual futilities: he had supposed that he was in excellent time, his watch had been playing tricks, and so on.

Mrs. Watton, who, after all, on this great day beheld in the new member the visible triumph of her dearest principles, received these excuses at first with stiffness, but soon thawed.

"Oh, you *naughty* boy, you naughty, mendacious boy!" said a sprightly voice in Tressady's ear. "'Excellent time,' indeed! I saw you — for shame!"

And Lady Tressady flounced away from her son, laughing over her shoulder in one of her accustomed poses. She wore white muslin over cherry-coloured silk. The display of neck and shoulders could hardly have been more lavish; and the rouge on her cheeks had been overdone, which rarely happened. George turned from her hurriedly to speak to Lord Fontenoy.

"What a fool that woman is!" thought Mrs. Watton

to herself, as her sharp eye followed her guest. "She will make George positively dislike her soon — and all the time she is bound to get him to pay her debts, or there will be a smash. What! dinner? John, will you please take Lady Tressady; Harding, will you take Mrs. Hawkins" — pointing her second son towards a lady in black sitting stiffly on the edge of an ottoman; "Mr. Hawkins takes Florence; Sir George" — she waved her hand towards Miss Sewell. "Now, Lord Fontenoy, you must take me; and the rest of you sort yourselves."

As the young people, mostly cousins, laughingly did what they were told, Sir George held out his arm to Miss Sewell.

"I am very sorry for you," he said, as they passed into the dining-room.

"Oh! I knew it would be my turn," said Letty, with resignation. "You see, you took Florrie last night, and Aunt Watton the night before."

George settled himself deliberately in his chair, and turned to study his companion.

"Do you mind warning me, to begin with, how I can avoid giving you a headache? Since this morning my nerve has gone — I want directions."

"Well — " said Letty, pondering, "let us lay down the subjects we *may* talk about first. For instance, you may talk of Mrs. Hawkins."

She gave an imperceptible nod which directed his eyes to the thin woman sitting opposite, to whom Harding Watton, a fashionable and fastidious youth, was paying but scant attention.

George examined her.

"I don't want to," he said shortly; "besides, she would last us no time at all."

"Oh!—on the contrary," said Letty, with malice sparkling in her brown eye, "she would last me a good twenty minutes. She has got on my gown."

"I didn't recognise it," said George, studying the thin lady again.

"I wouldn't mind," said Letty, in the same tone of reflection, "if Mrs. Hawkins didn't think it her duty to lecture me in the intervals of copying my frocks. If I disapproved of anybody, I don't think I should send my nurse to ask their maid for patterns."

"I notice you take disapproval very calmly."

"Callously, you mean. Well, it is my misfortune. I always feel myself so much more reasonable than the people who disapprove."

"This morning, then, you thought me a fool?"

"Oh no! Only—well—I *knew*, you see, that I knew better. *I* was reasonable, and—"

"Oh! don't finish," said George, hastily; "and don't suppose that I shall ever give you any more good advice."

"Won't you?"

Her mocking look sent a challenge, which he met with outward firmness. Meanwhile he was inwardly haunted by a phrase he had once heard a woman apply to the mental capacities of her best friend. "Her *mind?*—her mind, my dear, is a shallow chaos!" The words made a neat label, he scoffingly thought, for his own present sensations. For he could not persuade himself that there was much profundity in his feelings towards Miss Sewell, whatever reckless

possibilities life might seem to hold at times; when, for instance, she wore that particular pink gown in which she was attired to-night, or when her little impertinent airs suited her as well as they were suiting her just now. Something cool and critical in him was judging her all the time. Ten years hence, he made himself reflect, she would probably have no prettiness left. Whereas now, what with bloom and grace, what with small proportions and movements light as air, what with an inventive refinement in dress and personal adornment that never failed, all Letty Sewell's defects of feature or expression were easily lost in a general aspect which most men found dazzling and perturbing enough. Letty, at any rate within her own circle, had never yet been without partners, or lovers, or any other form of girlish excitement that she desired, and had been generally supposed — though she herself was aware of some strong evidence to the contrary — to be capable of getting anything she had set her mind upon. She had set her mind, as the spectators in this particular case had speedily divined, upon enslaving young George Tressady. And she had not failed. For even during these last stirring days it had been tolerably clear that she and his election had divided Tressady's mind between them, with a balance, perhaps, to her side. As to the *measure* of her success, however, that was still doubtful — to herself and him most of all.

To-night, at any rate, he could not detach himself from her. He tried repeatedly to talk to the girl on his left, a noble-faced child fresh out of the schoolroom, who in three years' time would be as much

Letty Sewell's superior in beauty as in other things. But the effort was too great. The strenuous business of the day had but left him — in fatigue and reaction — the more athirst for amusement and the gratification of another set of powers. He turned back to Letty, and through course after course they chattered and sparred, discussing people, plays and books, or rather, under cover of these, a number of those topics on the borderland of passion whereby men and women make their first snatches at intimacy — till Mrs. Watton's sharp grey eyes smiled behind her fan, and the attention of her neighbour, Lord Fontenoy — an uneasy attention — was again and again drawn to the pair.

Meanwhile, during the first half of dinner, a chair immediately opposite to Tressady's place remained vacant. It was being kept for the eldest son of the house, his mother explaining carelessly to Lord Fontenoy that she believed he was "Out parish-ing somewhere, as usual."

However, with the appearance of the pheasants the door from the drawing-room opened, and a slim dark-haired man slipped in. He took his place noiselessly, with a smile of greeting to George and his neighbour, and bade the butler in a whisper aside bring him any course that might be going.

"Nonsense, Edward!" said his mother's loud voice from the head of the table; "don't be ridiculous. Morris, bring back that hare *entrée* and the mutton for Mr. Edward."

The newcomer raised his eyebrows mildly, smiled, and submitted.

"Where have you been, Edward?" said Tressady; "I haven't seen you since the town-hall."

"I have been at a rehearsal. There is a parish concert next week, and I conduct these functions."

"The concerts are always bad," said Mrs. Watton, curtly.

Edward Watton shrugged his shoulder. He had a charming timid air, contradicted now and then by a look of enthusiastic resolution in the eyes.

"All the more reason for rehearsal," he said. "However, really, they won't do badly this time."

"Edward is one of the persons," said Mrs. Watton in a low aside to Lord Fontenoy, "who think you can make friends with people — the lower orders — by shaking hands with them, showing them Burne-Jones's pictures, and singing 'The Messiah' with them. I had the same idea once. Everybody had. It was like the measles. But the sensible persons have got over it."

"Thank you, mamma," said Watton, making her a smiling bow.

Lady Tressady interrupted her talk with the squire at the other end of the table to observe what was going on. She had been chattering very fast in a shrill, affected voice, with a gesticulation so free and French, and a face so close to his, that the nervous and finicking squire had been every moment afraid lest the next should find her white fingers in his very eyes. He felt an inward spasm of relief when he saw her attention diverted.

"Is that Mr. Edward talking his Radicalism?" she asked, putting up a gold eyeglass — "his dear, wicked Radicalism? Ah! we all know where Mr. Edward got it."

The table laughed. Harding Watton looked particularly amused.

"Egeria was in this neighbourhood last week," he said, addressing Lady Tressady. "Edward rode over to see her. Since then he has joined two new societies, and ordered six new books on the Labour Question."

Edward flushed a little, but went on eating his dinner without any other sign of disturbance.

"If you mean Lady Maxwell," he said good-humouredly, "I can only be sorry for the rest of you that you don't know her."

He raised his handsome head with a bright air of challenge that became him, but at the same time exasperated his mother.

"That *woman!*" said Mrs. Watton with ponderous force, throwing up her hands as she spoke. Then she turned to Lord Fontenoy. "Don't *you* regard her as the source of half the mischievous work done by this precious Government in the last two years?" she asked him imperiously.

A half-contemptuous smile crossed Lord Fontenoy's worn face.

"Well, really, I'm not inclined to make Lady Maxwell the scapegoat. Let them bear their own misdeeds."

"Besides, what worse can you say of English Ministers than that they should be led by a woman?" said Mr. Watton, from the bottom of the table, in a piping voice. "In my young days such a state of things would have been unheard of. No offence, my dear, no offence," he added hastily, glancing at his wife.

Letty glanced at George, and put up a handkerchief to hide her own merriment.

Mrs. Watton looked impatient.

"Plenty of English Cabinet Ministers have been led by women before now," she said drily; "and no blame to them or anybody else. Only in the old days you knew where you were. Women were corrupt — as they were meant to be — for their husbands and brothers and sons. They wanted something for somebody — and got it. Now they are corrupt — like Lady Maxwell — for what they are pleased to call 'causes,' and it is that which will take the nation to ruin."

At this there was an incautious protest from Edward Watton against the word "corrupt," followed by a confirmatory clamour from his mother and brother which seemed to fill the dining-room. Lady Tressady threw in affected comments from time to time, trying hard to hold her own in the conversation by a liberal use of fan and Christian names, and little personal audacities applied to each speaker in turn. Only Edward Watton, however, occasionally took civil or smiling notice of her; the others ignored her. They were engaged in a congenial task, the hunting of the one disaffected and insubordinate member of their pack, and had for the moment no attention to spare for other people.

"I shall see the great lady, I suppose, in a week or two," said George to Miss Sewell, under cover of the noise. "It is curious that I should never have seen her."

"Who? Lady Maxwell?"

"Yes. You remember I have been four years out

of England. She was in town, I suppose, the year before I left, but I never came across her."

"I prophesy you will like her enormously," said Letty, with decision. "At least, I know that's what happens to me when Aunt Watton abuses anybody. I couldn't dislike them afterwards if I tried."

"That, allow me to impress upon you, is *not* my disposition! I am a human being — I am influenced by my friends."

He turned round towards her so as to appropriate her again.

"Oh! you are not at all the poor creature you paint yourself!" said Letty, shaking her head. "In reality, you are the most obstinate person I know — you can never let a subject alone — you never know when you're beaten."

"Beaten?" said George, reflectively; "by a headache? Well, there is no disgrace in that. One will probably 'live to fight another day.' Do you mean to say that you will take no notice — no notice — of all that array of facts I laid before you this morning on the subject of Captain Addison?"

"I shall be kind to you, and forget them. Now, do listen to Aunt Watton! It is your duty. Aunt Watton is accustomed to be listened to, and you haven't heard it all a hundred times before, as I have."

Mrs. Watton, indeed, was haranguing her end of the table on a subject that clearly excited her. Contempt and antagonism gave a fine energy to a head and face already sufficiently expressive. Both were on a large scale, but without commonness. The old-lace coif she wore suited her waved and grizzled hair, and was car-

ried with conscious dignity; the hand, which lay beside her on the table, though long and bony, was full of nervous distinction. Mrs. Watton was, and looked, a tyrant — but a tyrant of ability.

"A neighbour of theirs in Brookshire," she was saying, "was giving me last week the most extraordinary account of the doings at Mellor. She was the heiress of that house at Mellor" — here she addressed young Bayle, who, as a comparative stranger in the house, might be supposed to be ignorant of facts which everybody else knew — "a tumbledown place with an income of about two thousand a year. Directly she married she put a Socialist of the most unscrupulous type — so they tell me — into possession. The man has established what they call a 'standard rate' of wages for the estate — practically double the normal rate — coerced all the farmers, and made the neighbours furious. They say the whole district is in a ferment. It used to be the quietest part of the world imaginable, and now she has set it all by the ears. *She*, having married thirty thousand a year, can afford her little amusements; other people, who must live by their land, have their lives worried out of them."

"She tells me that the system works on the whole extremely well," said Edward Watton, whose heightened colour alone betrayed the irritation of his mother's chronic aggression, "and that Maxwell is not at all unlikely to adopt it on his own estate."

Mrs. Watton threw up her hands again.

"The *idiocy* of that man! Till he married her he was a man of sense. And now she leads him by the nose, and whatever tune he calls, the Government

must dance to, because of his power in the House of Lords."

"And the worst of it is," said Harding Watton, with an unpleasant laugh, "that if she were not a handsome woman, her influence would not be half what it is. She uses her beauty in the most unscrupulous way."

"I believe that to be *entirely* untrue," said Edward Watton, with emphasis, looking at his brother with hostility.

George Tressady interrupted. He had an affection for Edward Watton, and cordially disliked Harding. "Is she really so handsome?" he asked, bending forward and addressing his hostess.

Mrs. Watton scornfully took no notice.

"Well, an old diplomat told me the other day," said Lord Fontenoy — but with a cold unwillingness, as though he disliked the subject — "that she was the most beautiful woman, he thought, that had been seen in London since Lady Blessington's time."

"Lady Blessington! dear, dear! — Lady Blessington!" said Lady Tressady with malicious emphasis — "an unfortunate comparison, don't you think? Not many people would like to be regarded as Lady Blessington's successor."

"In any other respect than beauty," said Edward Watton, haughtily, with the same tension as before, "the comparison, of course, would be ridiculous."

Harding shrugged his shoulders, and, tilting his chair back, said in the ear of a shy young man who sat next him:

"In my opinion, the Count d'Orsay is only a ques-

tion of time! However, one mustn't say that to Edward."

Harding read memoirs, and considered himself a man of general cultivation. The young man addressed, who read no printed matter outside the sporting papers that he could help, and had no idea as to who Lady Blessington and Count d'Orsay might be, smiled vaguely, and said nothing.

"My dear," said the squire, plaintively, "isn't this room extremely hot?"

There was a ripple of meaning laughter from all the young people, to many of whom this particular quarrel was already tiresomely familiar. Mr. Watton, who never understood anything, looked round with an inquiring air. Mrs. Watton condescended to take the hint and retire.

In the drawing-room afterwards Mrs. Watton first allotted a duty-conversation of some ten minutes in length, and dealing strictly with the affairs of the parish, to Mrs. Hawkins, who, as clergyman's wife, had a definite official place in the Malford House circle, quite irrespective of any individuality she might happen to possess. Mrs. Hawkins was plain, self-conscious, and in no way interesting to Mrs. Watton, who never took the smallest trouble to approach her in any other capacity than that upon which she had entered by marrying the incumbent of the squire's home living. But the civilities and respects that were recognised as belonging to her station she received.

This however, alas! was not enough for Mrs.

Hawkins, who was full of ambitions, which a bad manner, a plague of shyness, and a narrow income, were perpetually thwarting. As soon as the ten minutes were over, and Mrs. Watton, who was nothing if not political, and saw no occasion to make a stranger of the vicar's wife, had plunged into the evening papers brought her by the footman, Mrs. Hawkins threw herself on Letty Sewell. She was effusively grateful — too grateful — for the patterns lent her by Miss Sewell's maid.

"Did she lend you some patterns?" said Letty, raising her brows. "Dear me; I didn't know."

And her eyes ran coolly over Mrs. Hawkins's attire, which did, indeed, present a village imitation of the delicate gown in which Miss Sewell had robed herself for the evening.

Mrs. Hawkins coloured.

"I specially told my nurse," she said hastily, "that of course your leave must be asked. But my nurse and your maid seem to have made friends. Of course my nurse has plenty of time for dressmaking with only one child of four to look after, and — and — one really gets no new ideas in a poky place like this. But I would not have taken a liberty for the world."

Her pride and *mauvaise honte* together made both voice and manner particularly unattractive. Letty was seized with the same temper that little boys show towards flies.

"Of course I am delighted!" she said indifferently. "It's so nice and good to have one's things made at home. Your nurse must be a treasure."

All the time her gaze was diligently inspecting

every ill-cut seam and tortured trimming of the home-made triumph before her. The ear of the vicar's wife, always morbidly sensitive in that particular drawing-room, caught a tone of insult in every light word. A passionate resentment flamed up in her, and she determined to hold her own.

"Are you going in for more visits when you leave here?" she inquired.

"Yes, two or three," said Letty, turning her delicate head unwittingly. She had been throwing blandishments to Mrs. Watton's dog, a grey Aberdeen terrier, who stood on the rug quietly regarding her.

"You spend most of the year in visits, don't you?"

"Well, a good deal of it," said Letty.

"Don't you find it dreadfully time-wasting? Does it leave you leisure for *any* serious occupations at all? I am afraid it would make *me* terribly idle!"

Mrs. Hawkins laughed, attempting a tone of banter.

Letty put up a small hand to hide a sudden yawn, which, however, was visible enough.

"Would it?" she said, with an impertinence which hardly tried to conceal itself. "Evelyn, do look at that dog. Doesn't he remind you of Mr. Bayley?"

She beckoned to the handsome child of sixteen who had sat on George Tressady's left hand at dinner, and, taking up a pinch of rose-leaves that had dropped from a vase beside her, she flung them at the dog, calling him to her. Instead of going to her, however, the dog slowly curled himself up on the rug, and, laying his nose along his front paws, stared at her steadily with the expression of one mounting guard.

"He never will make friends with you, Letty. Isn't it odd?" said Evelyn, laughing, and stooping to stroke the creature.

"Never mind; other dogs will. Did you see that adorable black Spitz of Lady Arthur's? She has promised to give me one."

The two cousins fell into a chatter about their county neighbours, mostly rich and aristocratic people, of whom Mrs. Hawkins knew little or nothing. Evelyn Watton, whose instincts were quick and generous, tried again and again to draw the vicar's wife into the conversation. Letty was determined to exclude her. She lay back against the sofa, chatting her liveliest, the whiteness of her neck and cheek shining against the red of the damask behind, one foot lightly crossed over the other, showing her costly little slippers with their paste buckles. She sparkled with jewels as much as a girl may — more, indeed, in Mrs. Hawkins's opinion, than a girl should. From head to foot she breathed affluence, seduction, success — only the seduction was not for Mrs. Hawkins and her like.

The vicar's wife sat flushed and erect on her chair, disdaining after a time to make any further effort, but inwardly intolerably sore. She could not despise Letty Sewell, unfortunately, since Letty's advantages were just those that she herself most desired. But there was something else in her mind than small jealousy. When Letty had been a brilliant child in short frocks, the vicar's wife, who was scarcely six years older, had opened her heart, had tried to make herself loved by Mrs. Watton's niece. There had

been a moment when they had been "Madge" and "Letty" to each other, even since Letty had "come out." Now, whenever Mrs. Hawkins attempted the Christian name, it stuck in her throat; it seemed, even to herself, a familiarity that had nothing to go upon; while with every succeeding visit to Malford, Letty had dropped her former friend more decidedly, and "Madge" was heard no more.

The gentlemen, deep in election incident and gossip, were, in the view chiefly of the successful candidate, unreasonably long in leaving the dining-room. When they appeared at last, George Tressady once more made an attempt to talk to someone else than Letty Sewell, and once more failed.

"I want you to tell me something about Miss Sewell," said Lord Fontenoy presently in Mrs. Watton's ear. He had been sitting silent beside her on the sofa for some little time, apparently toying with the evening papers, which Mrs. Watton had relinquished to him.

Mrs. Watton looked up, followed the direction of his eyes towards a settee in a distant corner of the room, and showed a half-impatient amusement.

"Letty? Oh! Letty's my niece — the daughter of my brother, Walter Sewell, of Helbeck. They live in Yorkshire. My brother has my father's place — a small estate, and rents very irregular. I often wonder how they manage to dress that child as they do. However, she has always had her own way since she was a foot high. As for my poor brother, he has

been an invalid for the last ten years, and neither he nor his wife — oh! such a stupid woman!" — Mrs. Watton's energetic hands and eyes once more, called Heaven to witness — "have ever counted for much, I should say, in Letty's career. There is another sister, a little delicate, silent thing, that looks after them. Oh! Letty isn't stupid; I should think not. I suppose you're alarmed about Sir George. You needn't be. She does it with everybody."

The candid aunt pursued the conversation a little further, in the same tone of a half-caustic indulgence. At the end of it, however, Lord Fontenoy was still uneasy. He had only migrated to Malford House for the declaration of the poll, having spent the canvassing weeks mainly in another part of the division. And now, on this triumphant evening, he was conscious of a sudden sense of defective information, which was disagreeable and damping.

When bedtime came, Letty lingered in the drawing-room a little behind the other ladies, on the plea of gathering up some trifles that belonged to her. So that when George Tressady went out with her to light her candle for her in the gallery, they found themselves alone.

He had fallen into a sudden silence, which made her sweep him a look of scrutiny as she took her candlestick. The slim yet virile figure drawn to its full height, the significant, long-chinned face, pleased her senses. He might be plain — she supposed he was — but he was, nevertheless, distinguished, and extraordinarily alive.

"I believe you are tired to death," she said to him. "Why don't you go to bed?"

She spoke with the freedom of one accustomed to advise all her male acquaintance for their good. George laughed.

"Tired? Not I. I was before dinner. Look here, Miss Sewell, I've got a question to ask."

"Ask it."

"You don't want to spoil my great day, do you? You do repent that headache?"

They looked at each other, dancing laughter in each pair of eyes, combined in his with an excited insistence.

"Good-night, Sir George," she said, holding out her hand.

He retained it.

"You do?" he said, bending over her.

She liked the situation, and made no immediate effort to change it.

"Ask me a month hence, when I have proved your statements."

"Then you admit it was all pretence?"

"I admit nothing," she said joyously. "I protected my friend."

"Yes, by injuring and offending another friend. Would it please you if I said I missed you *very* much at Malford to-day?"

"I will tell you to-morrow — it is so late! Please let me have my hand."

He took no notice, and they went hand-in-hand, she drawing him, to the foot of the stairs.

"George!" said a shrill, hesitating voice from overhead.

George looked up, and saw his mother. He and Letty started apart, and in another second Letty had glided upstairs and disappeared.

"Yes, mother," said George, impatiently.

"Will you come here?"

He mounted, and found Lady Tressady a little discomposed, but as affected as usual.

"Oh, George! it was so dark — I didn't see — I didn't know. George, will you have half an hour's talk with me after breakfast to-morrow? Oh, George, my dear boy, my *dear* boy! Your poor mammy understands!"

She laid one hand on his shoulder and, lifting her feather fan in the other, shook it with playful meaning in the direction whither Letty had departed.

George hastily withdrew himself. "Of course I will have a talk with you, mother. As for anything else, I don't know what you mean. But you really must let me go to bed; I am much too tired to talk now. Good-night."

Lady Tressady went back to her room, smiling but anxious.

"She has caught him!" she said to herself; "barefaced little flirt! It is not altogether the best thing for me. But it may dispose him to be generous, if — if I can play my cards."

Letty Sewell meanwhile had reached the quiet of a luxurious bedroom, and summoned her maid to her assistance. When the maid departed, the mistress held long counsel with herself over the fire: the general position of her affairs; what she desired; what

other people intended; her will, and the chances, of getting it. Her thoughts dealt with these various problems in a skilled and business-like way. To a particular form of self-examination Letty was well accustomed, and it had become by now a strong agent in the development of individuality, as self-examination of another sort is said to be by other kinds of people.

She herself was pleasantly conscious of real agitation. George Tressady had touched her feelings, thrilled her nerves, more than — Yes! she said to herself decidedly, more than anybody else, more than "the rest." She thought of "the rest," one after the other — thought of them contemptuously. Yet, certainly few girls in her own set and part of the country had enjoyed a better time — few, perhaps, had dared so many adventures. Her mother had never interfered with her; and she herself had not been afraid to be "talked about." Dances, picnics, moonlight walks; the joys of outrageous "sitting-out," and hot rivalries with prettier girls; of impertinences towards the men who didn't matter, and pretty flatteries towards the men who did — it was all pleasant enough to think of. She could not reproach herself with having missed any chances, any opportunities her own will might have given her.

And yet — well, she was tired of it! — out of love altogether with her maiden state and its opportunities. She had come to Malford House in a state of soreness, which partly accounted, perhaps, for such airs as she had been showing to poor Mrs. Hawkins. During the past year a particular marriage — the

marriage of her neighbourhood — had seemed intermittently within her reach. She had played every card she knew — and she had failed! Failed, too, in the most humiliating way. For the bride, indeed, was chosen; but it was not Letty Sewell, but one of Letty's girl-neighbours.

To-night, almost for the first time, she could bear to think of it; she could even smile at it. Vanity and ambition alone had been concerned, and to-night these wild beasts of the heart were soothed and placable.

Well, it was no great match, of course — if it came off. All that Aunt Watton knew about the Tressadys had been long since extracted from her by her niece. And with Tressady himself Letty's artless questions had been very effective. She knew almost all that she wished to know. No doubt Ferth was a very second-rate "place"; and, since those horrid miners had become so troublesome, his income as a coal-owner could not be what his father's had been — three or four thousand a year, she supposed — more, perhaps, in good years. It was not much.

Still — she pressed her hands on her eyes — he was *distinguished;* she saw that plainly already. He would be welcome anywhere.

"And we are *not* distinguished — that is just it. We are small people, in a rather dull set. And I have had hard work to make anything of it. Aunt Watton was very lucky to marry as she did. Of course, she *made* Uncle Watton marry her; but that was a chance — and papa always says nobody else could have done it!"

She fell happily thinking of Tressady's skirmishes with her, her face dimpling with amusement. Captain Addison! How amazed he would be could he know the use to which she had put his name and his very hesitating attentions. But he would never know; and meanwhile Sir George had been really pricked — really jealous! She laughed to herself — a low laugh of pure pleasure.

Yes — she had made up her mind. With a sigh, she put away from her all other and loftier ambitions. She supposed that she had not money or family enough. One must face the facts. George Tressady would take her socially into another *milieu* than her own, and a higher one. She told herself that she had always pined for Parliament, politics, and eminent people. Why should she not succeed in that world as well as in the Helbeck world? Of course she would succeed!

There was his mother — silly, painted old lady! She was naturally the *great* drawback; and Aunt Watton said she was absurdly extravagant, and would ruin Tressady if it went on. All the more reason why he should be protected. Letty drew herself sharply together in her pretty white dressing-gown, with the feeling that mothers of that kind must and could be kept in their place.

A house in town, of course — and *not* in Warwick Square, where, apparently, the Tressadys owned a house, which had been let, and was now once more in Sir George's hands. That might do for Lady Tressady — if, indeed, she could afford it when her son had married and taken other claims upon him.

Letty allowed her thoughts to wander dreamily on, envisaging the London life that was to be: the young member, Lord Fontenoy's special friend and *protégé* — the young member's wife making her way among great people, giving charming little parties at Ferth —

All very well! But what, please, were the facts on his side? She buried her small chin deep in her hands as she tried, frowning, to think it out. Certainly he was very much drawn, very much taken. She had watched him, sometimes, trying to keep away from her — and her lips parted in a broad smile as she recalled the triumph of his sudden returns and submissions. She believed he had a curious temper — easily depressed, for all his coolness. But he had never been depressed in her company.

Still, *nothing* was certain. All that had happened might melt away into nothingness with the greatest ease if — well! if the right steps were not taken. He was no novice, any more than she; he must have had scores of "affairs" by now, with that manner of his. Such men were always capable of second thoughts, of tardy retreats — and especially if there were the smallest thought of persecution, of pursuit.

She believed — she was nearly certain — he would have a reaction to-morrow, perhaps because his mother had caught them together. Next morning he would be just a little bored by the thought of it — a little bored by having to begin again where he had left off. Without great tact and skill the whole edifice might tumble together like a house of cards. Had she the courage to make difficulties — to put a water-ditch across his path?

It was close on midnight when Letty at last raised her little chin from the hands that held it and rang the bell that communicated with her maid's room, but cautiously, so as not to disturb the rest of the sleeping house.

"If Grier *is* asleep, she must wake up, that's all!"

Two or three minutes afterwards a dishevelled maid startled out of her first slumber appeared, to ask whether her mistress was ill.

"No, Grier, but I wanted to tell you that I have changed my mind about staying here till Saturday. I am going to-morrow morning by the 9.30 train. You can order a fly first thing, and bring me my breakfast early."

The maid, groaning at the thought of the boxes that would have to be packed in this inconceivable hurry, ventured to protest.

"Never mind, you can get the housemaid to help you," said Miss Sewell, decidedly. "I don't mind what you give her. Now go to bed, Grier. I'm sorry I woke you up; you look as tired as an owl."

Then she stood still, looking at herself — hands clasped lightly before her — in the long glass.

"'Letty went by the nine o'clock train,'" she said aloud, smiling, and mocking her own white reflection. "'Dear me! How sudden! how extraordinary! Yes, but that's like her. H'm —' Then he must write to me, for I shall write *him* a civil little note asking for that book I lent him. Oh! I *hope* Aunt Watton and his mother will bore him to death!"

She broke out into a merry laugh; then, sweeping

her mass of pretty hair to one side, she began rapidly to coil it up for the night, her fingers working as fast as her thoughts, which were busy with one ingenious plan after another for her next meeting with George Tressady.

CHAPTER III

During this same space of time, which for Miss Sewell's maid ended so disagreeably, George Tressady was engaged in a curious conversation.

He had excused himself from smoking, on the ground of fatigue, immediately after his parting from Letty. But he had only nominally gone to bed. He too found it difficult to tear himself from thinking and the fire, and had not begun to undress when he heard a knock at his door. On his reply, Lord Fontenoy entered.

"May I come in, Tressady?"

"By all means."

George, however, stared at his invader in some astonishment. His relations with Fontenoy were not personally intimate.

"Well, I'm glad to find you still up, for I had a few words on my mind to say to you before I go off to-morrow. Can you spare me ten minutes?"

"Certainly; do sit down. Only — well, I'm afraid I'm pretty well done. If it's anything important, I can't promise to take it in."

Lord Fontenoy for a moment made no reply. He stood by the fire, looking at the cigarette he still held, in silence. George watched him with repressed annoyance.

"It's been a very hot fight, this," said Fontenoy at last, slowly, "and you've won it well. All our band have prospered in the matter of elections. But this contest of yours has been, I think, the most conspicuous that any of us have fought. Your speeches have made a mark — one can see that from the way in which the Press has begun to take them, political beginner though you are. In the House you will be, I think, our best speaker — of course with time and experience. As for me, if you give me a fortnight to prepare in, I can make out something. Otherwise I am no use. *You* will take a good debating place from the beginning. Well, it is only what I expected."

The speaker stopped. George, fidgeting in his chair, said nothing; and presently Fontenoy resumed:

"I trust you will not think what I am going to say an intrusion, but — you remember my letters to you in India?"

George nodded.

"They put the case strongly, I think," Fontenoy went on, "but, in my opinion, not strongly enough. This wretched Government is in power by the help of a tyranny — a tyranny of Labour. They call themselves Conservatives — they are really State Socialists, and the mere catspaws of the revolutionary Socialists. You and I are in Parliament to break down that tyranny, if we can. This year and next will be all-important. If we can hold Maxwell and his friends in check for a time — if we can put some backbone into the party of freedom — if we can rally and call up the forces we have in the country, the thing will be done. We shall have established the

counterpoise — we shall very likely turn the next election, and liberty — or what still remains of it! — will be saved for a generation. But to succeed, the effort, the sacrifice, from each one of us, will have to be *enormous.*"

Fontenoy paused, and looked at his companion. George was lying back in an armchair with his eyes shut. Why on earth — so he was thinking — should Fontenoy have chosen this particular hour and this particular night to *débiter* these very stale things, that he had already served up in innumerable speeches and almost every letter that George had received from him?

"I don't suppose it will be child's-play," he said, stifling a yawn — "hope I shall feel keener after a night's rest!" He looked up with a smile.

Fontenoy dropped his cigarette into the fender and stood silent a moment, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Look here, Tressady!" he said at last, turning to his companion; "you remember how affairs stood with me when you left England? I didn't know much of you, but I believe, like many of my juniors, you knew a great deal about me?"

George made the sign of assent expected of him.

"I knew something about you, certainly," he said, smiling; "it was not difficult."

Fontenoy smiled too, though without geniality. Geniality had become impossible to a man always overworked and on edge.

"I was a fool," he said quickly — "an open and notorious fool. But I enjoyed my life. I don't suppose anyone ever enjoyed life more. Every day of

my former existence gave the lie to the good people who tell you that to be happy you must be virtuous. I was idle, extravagant, and vicious, and I was one of the happiest of men. As to my racing and my horses, they were a constant delight to me. I can't think now of those mornings on the Heath — the gallops of my colts — the change and excitement of it all, without longing for it to come back again. Yet I have never owned a horse, or seen a race, or made a bet, for the last three years. I never go into society, except for political purposes; and I scarcely ever touch wine. In fact, I have thrown overboard everything that once gave *me* pleasure and amusement so completely that I have, perhaps, some right to press upon the party that follows me my conviction that unless each and all of us give up private ease and comfort as I have done — unless we are contented, as the Parnellites were, to be bores in the House and nuisances to ourselves — to peg away in season and out of season — to give up everything for the cause, we may just as well not go into the fight at all — for we shall do nothing with it."

George clasped his hands round his knee, and stared stubbornly into the fire. Sermonising was all very well, but Fontenoy did too much of it; nobody need suppose that he would have done what he had done, unless, on the whole, it had given him more pleasure to do it than not to do it.

"Well," he said, looking up at last with a laugh, "I wonder what you *mean* — really. Do you mean, for instance, that I oughtn't to get myself married?"

His offhand manner covered a good deal of irrita-

tion. He made a shrewd guess at the idea in Fontenoy's mind, and meant to show that he would not be dictated to.

Fontenoy also laughed, with as little geniality as before. Then he applied himself to a deliberate answer.

"*This* is what I mean. If you, just elected — at the beginning of this critical session — were to give your best mind to anything else in the world than the fight before us, I should regard you as, for the time, at any rate, lost to us — as, so far, betraying us."

The colour rushed into George's cheeks.

"Upon my word!" he said, springing up — "upon my word, you are a taskmaster!"

Fontenoy hastened to reply, in a different tone, "I only want to keep the machine in order."

George paced up and down for a few moments without speaking. Presently he paused.

"Look here, Fontenoy! I cannot look at the matter as you do, and we may as well understand each other. To me, this election of mine is, after all, an ordinary affair. I take it, and what is to come after it, just as other men do. I have accepted your party and your programme, and I mean to stick to them. I see that the political situation is difficult and exciting, and I don't intend to shirk. But I am no more going to slay my private life and interests at the altar of politics than my father did when he was in Parliament. If the revolution is coming, it will come in spite of you and me. And, moreover — if you will let me say so — I am convinced that your modes of procedure are not even profitable to the cause in the

long run. No man can work as you do, without rest and without distraction. You will break down, and then, where will the 'cause' be?"

Lord Fontenoy surveyed the speaker with a curious, calculating look. It was as though, with as much rapidity as his mind was capable of, he balanced a number of pros and cons against each other, and finally decided to let the matter drop, perhaps not without some regret for having raised it.

"Ah! well," he said, "I have no doubt that what I have said appears to you mere meddlesomeness. If so, you will change your view, and you will forgive me. I must trust the compulsion of the situation. You will realise it, as I have done, when you get well into the fight. There is something in this Labour tyranny which rouses all a man's passions, bad and good. If it does not rouse yours, I have been much mistaken in my estimate of you. As for me, don't waste your concern. There are few stronger men than I. You forget, too—"

There was a pause. Of late years, since his transformation in fact, Lord Fontenoy's stiff reserve about himself had been rarely broken through. At this moment, however, George, looking up, saw that his companion was in some way moved by a kind of sombre and personal emotion.

"You forget," the speaker resumed, "that I learnt nothing either at school or college, and that a man who wants to lead a party must, some time or other, pay for that precious privilege. When you left England, the only financial statement I could understand was a betting-book. I knew no history except what

one gets from living among people who have been making it, and even that I was too lazy to profit by. I couldn't understand the simplest economical argument, and I *hated* trouble of all kinds. Nothing but the toil of a galley-slave could have enabled me to do what I have done. You would be astonished sometimes if you could look in upon me at night and see what I am doing — what I am obliged to do to keep up the most elementary appearances."

George was touched. The tone of the speaker had passed suddenly into one of plain dignity, in spite of, perhaps because of, the half-bitter humility that mingled with it.

"I know you make one ashamed," he said sincerely, though awkwardly. "Well, don't distrust me; I'll do my best."

"Good-night," said Lord Fontenoy, and held out his hand. He had gained no promises, and George had shown and felt annoyance. Yet the friendship between the two men had sensibly advanced.

George shut the door upon him, and came back to the fire to ponder this odd quarter of an hour.

His experience certainly contained no more extraordinary fact than this conversion of a gambler and a spendthrift into the passionate leader of an arduous cause. Only one quality linked the man he remembered with the politician he had now pledged himself to follow — the quality of intensity. Dicky Fontenoy in his follies had been neither gay nor lovable, but his fierce will, his extravagant and reckless force, had given him the command of men softer than him-

self. That will and that force were still there, steeled and concentrated. But George Tressady was sometimes restlessly doubtful as to how far he himself was prepared to submit to them.

His personal acquaintance with Fontenoy was of comparatively recent date. He himself had been for some four years away from England, to which he had only returned about three months before the Market Malford election. A letter from Fontenoy had been the immediate cause of his return; but before it arrived the two men had been in no direct communication.

The circumstances of Tressady's long absence concern his later story, and were on this wise. His father, Sir William, the owner of Ferth Place, in West Mercia, died in the year that George, his only surviving child and the son of his old age, left college. The son, finding his father's debts considerable and his own distaste for the law, to which he had been destined, amazingly increased by his newly acquired freedom to do what he liked with himself, turned his mind at once towards travelling. Travel he must if he was ever to take up public and parliamentary life, and for no other profession — so he announced — did he feel the smallest vocation. Moreover, economy was absolutely necessary. During his absence the London house could be let, and Lady Tressady could live quietly at Ferth upon an allowance, while his uncles looked after the colliery property.

Lady Tressady made no difficulty, except as to the figure first named for the proposed allowance, which she declared was absurd. The uncles, elderly business men, could not understand why the younger genera-

tion should not go into harness at once without indulgences, as they themselves had done; but George got his way, and had much reason to show for it. He had not been idle at college, though perhaps at no time industrious enough. Influenced by natural ambition and an able tutor, he had won some distinction, and he was now a man full of odds and ends of ideas, of nascent interests, curiosities, and opinions, strongly influenced moreover already, though he said less about it than about other things, by the desire for political distinction. While still at college he had been especially attracted — owing mainly to the chances of an undergraduate friendship — by a group of Eastern problems bearing upon England's future in Asia; and he was no sooner free to govern himself and his moderate income than there flamed up in him the Englishman's passion to see, to touch, to handle, coupled with the young man's natural desire to go where it was dangerous to go, and where other men were not going. His friend — the son of an eminent geographer, possessed by inheritance of the explorer's instincts — was just leaving England for Asia Minor, Armenia, and Persia. George made up his mind, hastily but firmly, to go with him, and his family had to put up with it.

The year, however, for which the young fellow had stipulated went by; two others were added to it; and a fourth began to run its course — still George showed but faint signs of returning. According to his letters home, he had wandered through Persia, India, and Ceylon; had found friends and amusement everywhere; and in the latter colony had even served

eight months as private secretary to the Governor, who had taken a fancy to him, and had been suddenly bereft by a boating accident of the indispensable young man who was accustomed to direct the hospitalities of Government House before Tressady's advent. Thence he went to China and Japan, made a trip from Pekin into Mongolia, landed on Formosa, fell in with some French naval officers at Saigon, spending with them some of the gayest and maddest weeks of his life; explored Siam, and finally returned by way of Burmah to Calcutta, with the dim intention this time of some day, before long, taking ship for home.

Meanwhile during the last months of his stay in Ceylon he had written some signed articles for an important English newspaper, which, together with the natural liking felt by the many important persons he had come to know in the East for an intelligent and promising young fellow, endowed with brains, family, and good manners, served to bring him considerably into notice. The tone of the articles was strongly English and Imperialist. The first of them came out immediately before his visit to Saigon, and Tressady thanked his lucky stars that the foreign reading of his French friends was, perhaps, not so extensive as their practical acquaintance with life. He was, however, proud of his first literary achievement, and it served to crystallise in him a number of ideas and sentiments which had previously represented rather the prejudices of a traveller accustomed to find his race in the ascendant, and to be well received by its official class than any reasoned political theory.

As he went on writing, conviction grew with statement, became a faith, ultimately a passion — till, as he turned homewards, he seemed to himself to have attained a philosophy sufficient to steer the rest of life by. It was the common philosophy of the educated and fastidious observer; and it rested on ideas of the greatness of England and the infinity of England's mission, on the rights of ability to govern as contrasted with the squalid possibilities of democracy, on the natural kingship of the higher races, and on a profound personal admiration for the virtues of the administrator and the soldier.

Now, no man in whom these perceptions take strong root early, need expect to love popular government. Tressady read his English newspapers with increasing disgust. On that little England in those far seas all depended, and England meant the English working-man with his flatteries of either party. He blundered and blustered at home, while the Empire, its services and its defences, by which alone all this pullulating "street folk" existed for a day, were in danger of starvation and hindrance abroad, to meet the unreasonable fancies of a degenerate race. A deep hatred of mob-rule rooted itself in Tressady, passing gradually, during his last three months in India, into a growing inclination to return and take his place in the fight — to have his say. "Government to the competent — *not* to the many," might have been the summary of his three years' experience.

Nor were private influences wanting. He was a West Mercian landowner in a coal-mining district, and owned a group of pits on the borders of his

estate. His uncles, who had shares in the property, reported to him periodically during his absence. With every quarter it seemed to Tressady that the reports grew worse and the dividends less. His uncles' letters, indeed, were full of anxieties and complaints. After a long period of peace in the coal-trade, it looked as though a time of hot war between masters and men was approaching. "We have to thrash them every fifteen years," wrote one of the uncles, "and the time is nearly up."

The unreason, brutality, and extravagance of the men; the tyranny of the Union; the growing insolence of the Union officials — Tressady's letters from home after a time spoke of little else. And Tressady's bankbook meanwhile formed a disagreeable comment on the correspondence. The pits were almost running at a loss; yet neither party had made up their minds to the trial of strength.

Tressady was still lingering in Bombay — though supposed to be on his way home — when Lord Fontenoy's letter reached him.

The writer referred slightly to their previous acquaintance, and to a remote family connection between himself and Tressady; dwelt in flattering terms on the reports which had reached him from many quarters of Tressady's opinions and abilities; described the genesis and aims of the new Parliamentary party, of which the writer was the founder and head; and finally urged him to come home at once, and to stand for Parliament as a candidate for the Market Malford division, where the influence of Fontenoy's family was considerable. Since the general election, which had taken place in

June, and had returned a moderate Conservative Government to power, the member for Market Malford had become incurably ill. The seat might be vacant at any moment. Fontenoy asked for a telegram, and urged the next steamer.

Tressady had already — partly from private talk, partly from the newspapers — learnt the main outlines of Lord Fontenoy's later story. The first political speech of Fontenoy's he had ever read made a half-farcical impression on him — let Dicky stick to his two-year-olds! The second he read twice over, and alike in it, in certain party manifestoes from the same hand printed in the newspapers, and in the letter he had now received, there spoke something for which it seemed to him he had been waiting. The style was rough and halting, but Tressady felt in it the note and power of a leader.

He took an hour's walk through the streets of Bombay to think it over, then sent his telegram, and booked his passage on his way home to luncheon.

Such, in brief outline, had been the origin of the two men's acquaintance. Since George's return they had been constantly together. Fontenoy had thrown his whole colossal power of work into the struggle for the Market Malford seat, and George owed him much.

After he was left to himself on this particular night, Tressady was for long restless and wakeful. In spite of resistance, Fontenoy's talk and Fontenoy's personality had nevertheless restored for the moment an earlier balance of mind. The interests of ambition

and the intellect returned in force. Letty Sewell had, no doubt, made life very agreeable to him during the past three weeks; but, after all — was it worth while?

Her little figure danced before the inward eye as his fire sank into darkness: fragments of her chatter ran through his mind. He began to be rather ashamed of himself. Fontenoy was right. It was not the moment. No doubt he must marry some day; he had come home, indeed, with the vague intention of marrying; but the world was wide, and women many. That he had very little romance in his temperament was probably due to his mother. His childish experiences of her character, and of her relations to his father, had left him no room, alas! for the natural childish opinion that all grown-ups, and especially all mothers, are saints. In India he had amused himself a good deal; but his adventures had, on the whole, confirmed his boyish bias. If he had been forced to put his inmost opinions about women into words, the result would have been crude — perhaps brutal; which did not prevent him from holding a very strong and vivid conviction of the pleasure to be got from their society.

Accordingly, he woke up next morning precisely in the mood that Letty, for her own reasons, had foreseen. It worried him to think that for two or three days more he and Letty Sewell must still be thrown together in close relations. He and his mother were waiting on at Malford for a day or two till some workmen should be out of his own house, which lay twenty miles away, at the farther edge of the Market

Malford division. Meanwhile a couple of shooting-parties had been arranged, mainly for his entertainment. Still, was there no urgent business that required him in town?

He sauntered in to breakfast a little before ten. Only Evelyn Watton and her mother were visible, most of the men having already gone off to a distant meet.

"Now sit down and entertain us, Sir George," said Mrs. Watton, holding out her hand to him with an odd expression. "We're as dull as ditchwater — the men have all gone — Florrie's in bed with a chill — and Letty departed by the 9.30 train."

George's start, as he took his coffee from her, did not escape her.

"Miss Sewell gone? But why this suddenness?" he inquired. "I thought Miss Letty was to be here to the end of the week."

Mrs. Watton raised her shoulders. "She sent a note in to me at half-past eight to say her mother wasn't well, and she was wanted at home. She just rushed in to say good-bye to me, chattered a great deal, kissed everybody a great deal — and I know no more. I hear she had breakfast and a fly, which is all I troubled myself about. I never interfere with the modern young woman."

Then she raised her eyeglass, and looked hard and curiously at Tressady. His face told her nothing, however, and as she was the least sympathetic of women, she soon forgot her own curiosity.

Evelyn Watton, a vision of fresh girlhood in her morning frock, glanced shyly at him once or twice as

she gave him scones and mustard. She was passing through a moment of poetry and happy dreams. All human beings walked glorified in her eyes, especially if they were young. Letty was not wholly to her taste, and had never been a particular friend. But she thought ill of no one, and her little heart must needs flutter tenderly in the presence of anything that suggested love and marriage. It had delighted her to watch George and Letty together. Now, why had Letty rushed away like this? *She* thought with concern, thrilling all the time, that Sir George looked grave and depressed.

George, however, was not depressed — or thought he was not. He walked into the library after breakfast, whistling, and quoting to himself:

> And there be they
> Who kissed his wings which brought him yesterday,
> And thank his wings to-day that he is flown.

He prided himself on his memory of some modern poets, and the lines pleased him particularly.

He had no sooner done quoting, however, than his mother peered into the room, claiming the business talk that had been promised. From that talk George emerged irritable and silent. His mother's extravagance was really preposterous! — not to be borne. For four years now he had been free from the constant daily friction of money troubles which had spoilt his youth and robbed him of all power of respecting his mother. And he had hugged his freedom. But all the time it seemed he had been hugging illusion, and the troubles had been merely piling up for his re-

turn! Her present claims — and he knew very well that they were not the whole — would exhaust all his available balance at his bankers'.

Lady Tressady, for her part, thought, with indignant despair, that he had not behaved at all as an only son should — especially an only son just returned to a widowed mother after four years' absence. How could anyone suppose that in four years there would be no debts — on such a pittance of an income? Some money, indeed, he had promised her; but not nearly enough, and not immediately. He "must look into things at home." Lady Tressady was enraged with herself and him that she had not succeeded better in making him understand how pressing, how *urgent*, matters were.

She *must*, indeed, bring it home to him that there might be a scandal at any moment. That odious livery-stable man, two or three dressmakers — in these directions every phase and shift of the debtor's long *finesse* had been exhausted long ago. Even *she* was at her wits' end.

As for other matters — But from these her thoughts turned hurriedly away. Luck would change, of course, sometime; it must change! No need to say anything about *that* just yet, especially while George's temper was in such a queer state.

It was very odd — most annoying! As a baby even he had never been caressing or sweet like other people's babies. And now, really! — why *her* son should have such unattractive ways!

But, manœuvre as she would, George would not be drawn into further discussion. She could only show

him offended airs, and rack her brains morning and night as to how best to help herself.

Meanwhile George had never been so little pleased with living as during these few days. He was overwhelmed with congratulations; and, to judge from the newspapers, "all England," as Lady Tressady said, "was talking of him." It seemed to him ridiculous that a man should derive so little entertainment from such a fact. Nevertheless, his dulness remained, and refused to be got rid of. He discussed with himself, of course, for a new set of reasons, the possibility of evading the shooting-parties, and departing. But he was deeply pledged to stay; and he was under considerable obligations to the Wattons. So he stayed; but he shot so as to increase his own dissatisfaction with the universe, and to make the other men in the house wonder what might be the general value of an Indian sporting reputation when it came to dealing with the British pheasant.

Then he turned to business. He tried to read some Parliamentary reports bearing on a coming measure, and full of notes by Fontenoy, which Fontenoy had left with him. But it only ended in his putting them hastily aside, lest in the mood of obscure contradiction that possessed him he should destroy his opinions before he had taken his seat.

On the day before the last "shoot," among the letters his servant brought him in the early morning, was one that he tore open in a hurry, tossing the rest aside.

It was from Miss Sewell, requesting, prettily, in as few words as possible, that he would return her a book she had lent him.

"My mother," she wrote, "has almost recovered from her sudden attack of chill. I trust the shooting-parties have amused you, and that you have read *all* Lord Fontenoy's Blue Books."

George wrote a reply before he went down to breakfast — a piece of ordinary small-talk, that seemed to him the most wretched stuff conceivable. But he pulled two pens to pieces before he achieved it.

Then he went out for a long walk alone, pondering what was the matter with him. Had that little witch dropped the old familiar poison into his veins after all? Certainly some women made life vivacity and pleasure, while others — his mother or Mrs. Watton, for instance — made it fatigue or tedium.

Ever since his boyhood Tressady had been conscious of intermittent assaults of melancholy, fits of some inner disgust, which hung the world in black, crippled his will, made him hate himself and despise his neighbours. It was, possibly, some half-conscious dread lest this morbid speck in his nature should gain upon the rest that made him so hungry for travel and change of scene after he left college. It explained many surprises, many apparent ficklenesses in his life. During the three weeks that he had spent in the same house with Letty Sewell he had never once been conscious of this lurking element of his life. And now, after four days, he found himself positively pining for her voice, the rustle of her delicate dress, her defiant, provocative ways that kept a man on the alert — still more, her smiling silences that seemed to challenge all his powers, the touch of her small cool hand that crushed so easily in his.

What had she left the house for in that wilful way? He did not believe her excuses. Yet he was mystified. Did she realise that things were becoming serious, and did she not mean them to be serious? If so, who or what hindered?

As for Fontenoy —

Tressady quickened his step impatiently as he recalled that harassed and toiling figure. Politics or no politics, *he* would live his life! Besides, it was obviously to his profit to marry. How could he ever make a common household with his mother? He meant to do his duty by her, but she annoyed and abashed him twenty times a day. He would be far happier married, far better able to do his work. He was not passionately in love — not at all. But — for it was no good fencing with himself any longer — he desired Letty Sewell's companionship more than he had desired anything for a long time. He wanted the right to carry off the little musical box, with all its tunes, and set it playing in his own house, to keep him gay. Why not? He could house it prettily, and reward it well.

As for the rest, he decided, without thinking about it, that Letty Sewell was well born and bred. She had, of course, all the little refinements a fastidious taste might desire in a woman. She would never discredit a man in society. On the contrary, she would be a great strength to him there. And she must be sweet-tempered, or that pretty child Evelyn Watton would not be so fond of her.

That pretty child, meanwhile, was absorbed in the excitement of her own small *rôle*. Tressady, who had

only made duty-conversation with her before, had found out somehow that she was sympathetic — that she would talk to him charmingly about Letty. After a very little pretending, he let himself go; and Evelyn dreamt at night of his confidences, her heart, without knowing it, leaping forward to the time when a man would look at her so, for her own sake — not another's. She forgot that she had ever criticised Letty, thought her vain or selfish. Nay, she made a heroine of her forthwith; she remembered all sorts of delightful things to say of her, simply that she might keep the young member talking in a corner, that she might still enjoy the delicious pride of feeling that she knew — she was helping it on.

After the big "shoot," for instance, when all the other gentlemen were stiff and sleepy, George spent the whole evening in chattering to Evelyn, or, rather, in making her chatter. Lady Tressady loitered near them once or twice. She heard the names "Letty," "Miss Sewell," passing and repassing — one talker catching up the other. Over any topic that included Miss Sewell they lingered; when anything was begun that did not concern her, it dropped at once, like a ball ill thrown. The mother went away smiling rather sourly.

She watched her son, indeed, cat-like all these days, trying to discover what had happened — what his real mind was. She did not wish for a daughter-in-law at all, and she had even a secret fear of Letty Sewell in that capacity. But somehow George must be managed, her own needs must be met. She felt that she might be undoing the future; but the present drove her on.

On the following morning, from one of Mrs. Watton's numerous letters there dropped out the fact that Letty Sewell was expected immediately at a country house in North Mercia whereof a certain Mrs. Corfield was mistress — a house only distant some twenty miles from the Tressadys' estate of Ferth Place.

"My sister-in-law has recovered with remarkable rapidity," said Mrs. Watton, raising a sarcastic eye. "Do you know anything of the Corfields, Sir George?"

"Nothing at all," said George. "One hears of them sometimes from neighbours. They are said to be very lively folk. Miss Sewell will have a gay time."

"Corfield?" said Lady Tressady, her head on one side and her cup balanced in two jewelled hands. "What! *Aspasia Corfield!* Why, my dear George — one of my oldest friends!"

George laughed — the short, grating laugh his mother so often evoked.

"Beg pardon, mother; I can only answer for myself. To the best of my belief I never saw her, either at Ferth or anywhere else."

"Why, Aspasia Corfield and I," said Lady Tressady with languid reflectiveness — "Aspasia Corfield and I copied each other's dresses, and bought our hats at the same place, when we were eighteen. I haven't seen her for an eternity. But Aspasia used to be a *dear* girl — and so fond of me!"

She put down her cup with a sigh, intended as a reproach to George. George only buried himself the deeper in his morning's letters.

Mrs. Watton, behind her newspaper, glanced grimly from the mother to the son.

"I wonder if that woman has a single real old friend in the world. How is George Tressady going to put up with her?"

The Wattons themselves had been on friendly terms with Tressady's father for many years. Since Sir William's death and George's absence, however, Mrs. Watton had not troubled herself much about Lady Tressady, in which she believed she was only following suit with the rest of West Mercia. But now that George had reappeared as a promising politician, his mother — till he married — had to be to some extent accepted along with him. Mrs. Watton accordingly had thought it her duty to invite her for the election, not without an active sense of martyrdom. "She always has bored me to tears since I first saw Sir William trailing her about," she would remark to Letty. "Where did he pick her up? The marvel is that she has kept respectable. She has never looked it. I always feel inclined to ask her at breakfast why she dresses for dinner twelve hours too soon!"

Very soon after the little conversation about the Corfields Lady Tressady withdrew to her room, sat thoughtful for a while, with her writing-block on her knee, then wrote a letter. She was perfectly aware of the fact that since George had come back to her she was likely to be welcome once more in many houses that for years had shown no particular desire to receive her. She took the situation very easily. It was seldom her way to be bitter. She was only determined to amuse herself, to enjoy her life in her own way. If people disapproved of her, she thought them fools, but it did not prevent her from trying to

make it up with them next day, if she saw an opening and it seemed worth while.

"There!" she said to herself as she sealed the letter, and looked at it with admiration, "I really have a knack for doing those things. I should think Aspasia Corfield would ask him by return — me, too, if she has any decency, though she *has* dropped me for fifteen years. She has a tribe of daughters. — *Why* I should play Miss Sewell's game like this I don't know! Well, one must try something."

That same afternoon mother and son took their departure for Ferth Place.

George, who had only spent a few weeks at Ferth since his return from India, should have found plenty to do both indoors and out. The house struck him as singularly dingy and out of order. Changes were imperatively demanded in the garden and in the estate. His business as a colliery-owner was in a tangled and critical condition. And meanwhile Fontenoy plied him incessantly with a political correspondence which of itself made large demands upon intelligence and energy.

Nevertheless he shuffled out of everything, unless it were the correspondence with Fontenoy. As to the notion that all the languor could be due merely to an unsatisfied craving for Letty Sewell's society, when it presented itself he still fought with it. The Indian climate might have somehow affected him. An English winter is soon forgotten, and has to be relearnt like a distasteful lesson.

About a week after their arrival at Ferth George

was sitting at his solitary breakfast when his mother came floating into the room, preceded by a rattle of bangles, a flutter of streamers, and the barking of little dogs.

She held various newly opened letters, and, running up to him, she laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Now"—thought George to himself with annoyance, "she is going to be arch!"

"Oh! you silly boy!" she said, holding him, with her head on one side. "Who's been cross and nasty to his poor old mammy? Who wants cheering up a bit before he settles down to his horrid work? Who would take his mammy to a nice party at a nice house, if he were prettily asked—eh? who would?"

She pinched his cheek before he could escape.

"Well, mother, of course you will do what you like," said George, walking off to supply himself with ham. "I shall not leave home again, just yet."

Lady Tressady smiled.

"Well, anyhow, you can read Aspasia Corfield's letter," she said, holding it out to him. "You know, really, that house isn't bad. They took over the Dryburghs' *chef*, and Aspasia knows how to pick her people."

"Aspasia!" The tone of patronising intimacy! George blushed, if his mother did not.

Yet he took the letter. He read it, then put it down, and walked to the window to look at a crowd of birds that had been collecting round a plate of food he had just put out upon the snow.

"Well, will you go?" said his mother.

"If you particularly wish it," he said, after a pause, in an embarrassed voice.

Lady Tressady's dimples were in full play as she settled herself into her seat and began to gather a supply of provisions. But as he returned to his place, and she glanced at him, she saw that he was not in a mood to be bantered, and understood that he was not going to let her force his confidence, however shrewdly she might guess at his affairs. So she controlled herself, and began to chatter about the Corfields and their party. He responded, and by the end of breakfast they were on much better terms than they had been for some weeks.

That morning also he wrote a cheque for her immediate necessities, which made her — for the time — a happy woman; and she overwhelmed him with grateful tears and embraces, which he did his best to bear.

Early in December he and she became the Corfields' guests. They found a large party collected, and Letty Sewell happily established as the spoilt child of the house. At the first touch of her hand, the first glance of her eyes, George's cloud dispersed.

"Why did you run away?" George asked her on the first possible occasion.

Letty laughed, fenced with the question for four days, during which George was never dull for a single instant, and then capitulated. She allowed him to propose to her, and was graciously pleased to accept him.

The following week Tressady went down with Letty to her home at Helbeck. He found an invalid

father, a remarkably foolish, inconsequent mother, and a younger sister, Elsie, on whom, as it seemed to him, the burdens of the house mainly rested.

The father, who was suffering from a slow but incurable disease, had the remains of much natural ability and acuteness. He was well content with Tressady as a son-in-law; though in the few interviews that Tressady was able to have with him on the question of settlements the young man took pains to state his money affairs as carefully and modestly as possible. Letty was not often in her father's room, and Mr. Sewell treated her, when she did come, rather like an agreeable guest than a daughter. But he was evidently extremely proud of her — as also was the mother — and he would talk much to George, when his health allowed it, of her good looks and her social success.

With the younger sister Tressady did not find it easy to make friends.

She was plain, sickly, and rather silent. She seemed to have scientific tastes and to be a great reader. And, so far as he could judge, the two sisters were not intimate.

"Don't hate me for taking her away!" he said, as he was bidding good-bye to Elsie, and glancing over her shoulder at Letty on the stairs.

The girl's quiet eyes were crossed by a momentary look of amusement. Then she controlled herself, and said gently:

"We didn't expect to keep her! Good-bye."

CHAPTER IV

"Oh, Tully, look at my cloak! You've let it fall! Hold my fan, please, and give me the opera-glasses."

The speaker was Miss Sewell. She and an elderly lady were sitting side by side in the stalls, about half-way down St. James's Hall. The occasion was a popular concert, and, as Joachim was to play, every seat in the hall was rapidly filling up.

Letty rose as she asked for the opera-glasses, and scanned the crowds streaming in through the side-doors.

"No—no signs of him! He must have been kept at the House, after all," she said, with annoyance. "Really, Tully, I do think you might have got a programme all this time! Why do you leave everything to me?"

"My dear!" said her companion, protesting, "you didn't tell me to."

"Well, I don't see why I should *tell* you everything. Of course I want a programme. Is that he? No! What a nuisance!"

"Sir George must have been detained," murmured her companion, timidly.

"What a very original thing to say, wasn't it, Tully?" remarked Miss Sewell, with sarcasm, as she sat down again.

The lady addressed was silent, instinctively waiting till Letty's nerves should have quieted down. She was a Miss Tulloch, a former governess of the Sewells, and now often employed by Letty, when she was in town, as a convenient chaperon. Letty was accustomed to stay with an aunt in Cavendish Square, an old lady who did not go out in the evenings. A chaperon therefore was indispensable, and Maria Tulloch could always be had. She existed somewhere in West Kensington, on an income of seventy pounds a year. Letty took her freely to the opera and the theatre, to concerts and galleries, and occasionally gave her a dress she did not want. Miss Tulloch clung to the connection as her only chance of relief from the boarding-house routine she detested, and was always abjectly ready to do as she was told. She saw nothing she was not meant to see, and she could be shaken off at a moment's notice. For the rest, she came of a stock of gentlefolk; and her invariable black dress, her bits of carefully treasured lace, the weak refinement of her face, and her timid manner did no discredit to the brilliant creature beside her.

When the first number of the programme was over, Letty got up once more, opera-glass in hand, to search among the late-comers for her missing lover. She nodded to many acquaintances, but George Tressady was not to be seen; and she sat down finally in no mood either to listen or to enjoy, though the magician of the evening was already at work.

"There's something very special, isn't there, you want to see Sir George about to-night?" Tully inquired humbly when the next pause occurred.

"Of course there is!" said Letty, crossly. "You do ask such foolish questions, Tully. If I don't see him to-night, he may let that house in Brook Street slip. There are several people after it — the agents told me."

"And he thinks it too expensive?"

"Only because of *her*. If she makes him pay her that preposterous allowance, of course it will be too expensive. But I don't mean him to pay it."

"Lady Tressady is terribly extravagant," murmured Miss Tulloch.

"Well, so long as she isn't extravagant with his money — *our* money — I don't care a rap," said Letty; "only she sha'n't spend all her own and all ours too, which is what she has been doing. When George was away he let her live at Ferth, and spend almost all the income, except five hundred a year that he kept for himself. And *then* she got so shamefully into debt that he doesn't know when he shall ever clear her. He gave her money at Christmas, and again, I am *sure*, just lately. Well! all I know is that it must be *stopped*. I don't know that I shall be able to do much till I'm married, but I mean to make him take this house."

"Is Lady Tressady nice to you? She is in town, isn't she?"

"Oh yes! she's in town. Nice?" said Letty, with a little laugh. "She can't bear me, of course; but we're quite civil."

"I thought she tried to bring it on?" said the confidante, anxious, above all things, to be sympathetic.

"Well, she brought him to the Corfields, and let me know she had. I don't know why she did it. I sup-

pose she wanted to get something out of him. Ah! *there* he is!"

And Letty stood up, smiling and beckoning, while Tressady's tall thin figure made its way along the central passage.

"Horrid House! What made you so late?" she said, as he sat down between her and Miss Tulloch.

George Tressady looked at her with delight. The shrewish contractions in the face, which had been very evident to Tully a few minutes before, had all disappeared, and the sharp slight lines of it seemed to George the height of delicacy. At sight of him colour and eyes had brightened. Yet at the same time there was not a trace of the raw girl about her. She knew very well that he had no taste for *ingénues*, and she was neither nervous nor sentimental in his company.

"Do you suppose I should have stayed a second longer than I was obliged?" he asked her, smiling, pressing her little hand under pretence of taking her programme.

The first notes of a new Brahms quartette mounted, thin and sweet, into the air. The musical portion of the audience, having come for this particular morsel, prepared themselves eagerly for the tasting and trying of it. George and Letty tried to say a few things more to each other before yielding to the general silence, but an old gentleman in front turned upon them a face of such disdain and fury they must needs laugh and desist.

Not that George was unwilling. He was tired; and silence with Letty beside him was not only re-

pose, but pleasure. Moreover, he derived a certain honest pleasure of a mixed sort from music. It suggested literary or pictorial ideas to him which stirred him, and gave him a sense of enjoyment. Now, as the playing flowed on, it called up delightful images in his brain: of woody places, of whirling forms, of quiet rivers, of thin trees Corot-like against the sky — scenes of pleading, of frolic, reproachful pain, dissolving joy. With it all mingled his own story, his own feeling; his pride of possession in this white creature touching him; his sense of youth, of opening life, of a crowded stage whereon his "cue" had just been given, his "call" sounded. He listened with eagerness, welcoming each fancy as it floated past, conscious of a grain of self-abandonment even — a rare mood with him. He was not absorbed in love by any means; the music spoke to him of a hundred other kindling or enchanting things. Nevertheless it made it doubly pleasant to be there, with Letty beside him. He was quite satisfied with himself and her; quite certain that he had done everything for the best. All this the music in some way emphasised — made clear.

When it was over, and the applause was subsiding, Letty said in his ear: "Have you settled about the house?"

He smiled down upon her, not hearing what she said, but admiring her dress, its little complication and subtleties, the violets that perfumed every movement, the slim fingers holding the fan. Her mere ways of personal adornment were to him like pleasant talk. They surprised and amused him — stood between him and ennui.

She repeated her question.

A frown crossed his brow, and the face changed wholly.

"Ah! — it is so difficult to see one's way," he said, with a little sigh of annoyance.

Letty played with her fan, and was silent.

"Do you so much prefer it to the others?" he asked her.

Letty looked up with astonishment.

"Why, it is a house!" she said, lifting her eyebrows; "and the others — "

"Hovels? Well, you are about right. The small London house is an abomination. Perhaps I can make them take less premium."

Letty shook her head.

"It is not at all a dear house," she said decidedly.

He still frowned, with the look of one recalled to an annoyance he had shaken off.

"Well, darling, if you wish it so much, that settles it. Promise to be still nice to me when we go through the Bankruptcy Court!"

"We will let lodgings, and I will do the waiting," said Letty, just laying her hand lightly against his for an instant. "Just think! That house would draw like anything. Of course, we will only take the eldest sons of peers. By the way, do you see Lord Fontenoy?"

They were in the middle of the "interval," and almost everyone about them, including Miss Tulloch, was standing up, talking or examining their neighbours.

George craned his neck round Miss Tulloch, and

saw Fontenoy sitting beside a lady, on the other side of the middle gangway.

"Who is the lady?" Letty inquired. "I saw her with him the other night at the Foreign Office."

George smiled.

"*That* — if you want to know — is Fontenoy's story!"

"Oh, but tell me at once!" said Letty, imperiously. "But he hasn't got a story, or a heart. He's only stuffed with blue-book."

"So I thought till a few weeks ago. But I know a good deal more now about Master Fontenoy than I did."

"But who is she?"

"She is a Mrs. Allison. Isn't that white hair beautiful? And her face — half saint, I always think — you might take her for a mother-abbess — and half princess. Did you ever see such diamonds?"

George pulled his moustaches, and grinned as he looked across at Fontenoy.

"Tell me quick!" said Letty, tapping him on the arm — "Is she a widow? — and is he going to marry her? Why didn't you tell me before? — why didn't you tell me at Malford?"

"Because I didn't know," said George, laughing. "Oh! it's a strange story — too long to tell now. She is a widow, but he is not going to marry her, apparently. She has a grown-up son, who hasn't yet found himself a wife, and thinks it isn't fair to him. If Fontenoy wants to introduce her, don't refuse. She is the mistress of Castle Luton, and has delightful parties. Yes! — if I'd known at Malford what I know now!"

And he laughed again, remembering Fontenoy's nocturnal incursion upon him, and its apparent object. Who would have imagined that the preacher of that occasion had ever given one serious thought to woman and woman's arts — least of all that he was the creation and slave of a woman!

Letty's curiosity was piqued, and she would have plied George with questions, but that she suddenly perceived that Fontenoy had risen, and was coming across to them.

"Gracious!" she said; "here he comes. I can't think why; he doesn't like me."

Fontenoy, however, when he had made his way to them, greeted Miss Sewell with as much apparent cordiality as he showed to anyone else. He had received George's news of the marriage with all decorum, and had since sent a handsome wedding-present to the bride-elect. Letty, however, was never at ease with him, which, indeed, was the case with most women.

He stood beside the *fiancés* for a minute or two, exchanging a few commonplaces with Letty on the performers and the audience; then he turned to George with a change of look.

"No need for us to go back to-night, I think?"

"What, to the House? Dear, no! Grooby and Haversham may be trusted to drone the evening out, I should hope, with no trouble to anybody but themselves. The Government are just keeping a house, that's all. Have you been grinding at your speech all day?"

Fontenoy shrugged his shoulders.

"I sha'n't get anything out that I want to say. Are you coming to the House on Friday, Miss Sewell?"

"Friday?" said Letty, looking puzzled.

George laughed.

"I told you. You must plead trousseau if you want to save yourself!"

Amusement shone in his blue eyes as they passed from Letty to Fontenoy. He had long ago discovered that Letty was incapable of any serious interest in his public life. It did not disturb him at all. But it tickled his sense of humour that Letty would have to talk politics all the same, and to talk them with people like Fontenoy.

"Oh! you mean your Resolution!" cried Letty. "Isn't it a Resolution? Yes, of course I'm coming. It's very absurd, for I don't know anything about it. But George says I must, and till I promise to obey, you see, I don't mind being obedient!"

Archness, however, was thrown away on Fontenoy. He stood beside her, awkward and irresponsive. Not being allowed to be womanish, she could only try once more to be political.

"It's to be a great attack on Mr. Dowson, isn't it?" she asked him. "You and George are mad about some things he has been doing? He's Home Secretary, isn't he? Yes, of *course!* And he's been driving trade away, and tyrannising over the manufacturers? I *wish* you'd explain it to me! I ask George, and he tells me not to talk shop."

"Oh, for goodness' sake," groaned George, "let it alone! I came to meet you and hear Joachim. However, I may as well warn you, Letty, that I

sha'n't have time to be married once Fontenoy's anti-Maxwell campaign begins; and it will go on till the Day of Judgment."

"Why anti-Maxwell," said Letty, puzzled. "I thought it was Mr. Dowson you are going to attack?"

George, a little vexed that she should require it, began to explain that as Maxwell was "only a miserable peer," he could have nothing to do with the House of Commons, and that Dowson was the official mouthpiece of the Maxwell group and policy in the Lower House. "The hands were the hands of Esau," etc. Letty meanwhile, conscious that she was not showing to advantage, flushed, began to play nervously with her fan, and wished that George would leave off.

Fontenoy did nothing to assist George's political lesson. He stood impassive, till suddenly he tried to look across his immediate neighbours, and then said, turning to Letty:

"The Maxwells, I see, are here to-night." He nodded towards a group on the left, some two or three benches behind them. "Are you an admirer of Lady Maxwell's, Miss Sewell?—you've seen her, of course?"

"Oh yes, *often!*" said Letty, annoyed by the question, standing, however, eagerly on tiptoe. "I know her, too, a little; but she never remembers me. She was at the Foreign Office on Saturday, with such a *hideous* dress on — it spoilt her completely."

"Hideous!" said Fontenoy, with a puzzled look. "Some artist — I forget who — came and raved to me about it; said it was like some Florentine picture — I forget what — don't think I ever heard of it."

Letty looked contemptuous. Her expression said that in this matter, at any rate, she knew what she was talking about. Nevertheless her eyes followed the dark head Fontenoy had pointed out to her.

Lady Maxwell was at the moment the centre of a large group of people, mostly men, all of whom seemed to be eager to get a word with her, and she was talking with great animation, appealing from time to time to a tall, broad-shouldered gentleman, with greyish hair, who stood, smiling and silent, at the edge of the group. Letty noticed that many glasses from the balcony were directed to this particular knot of persons; that everybody near them, or rather every woman, was watching Lady Maxwell, or trying to get a better view of her. The girl felt a secret pang of envy and dislike.

The figure of a well-known accompanist appeared suddenly at the head of the staircase leading from the artists' room. The interval was over, and the audience began to subside into attention.

Fontenoy bowed and took his leave.

"You see, he *didn't* introduce me," said Letty, not without chagrin, as she settled down. "And how plain he is! I think him uglier every time I see him."

George made a vague sound of assent, but did not really agree with her in the least. Fontenoy's air of overwork was more decided than ever; his eyes had almost sunk out of sight; the complexion of his broad strong face had reddened and coarsened from lack of exercise and sleep; his brown hair was thinning and grizzling fast. Nevertheless a man saw much to

admire in the ungainly head and long-limbed frame, and did not think any the better of a woman's intelligence for failing to perceive it.

After the concert, as George and Letty stood together in the crowded vestibule, he said to her, with a smile:

"So I take that house?"

"If you want to do anything disagreeable," she retorted, quickly, "don't *ask* me. Do it, and then wait till I am good-tempered again!"

"What a tempting prospect! Do you know that when you put on that particular hood that I would take Buckingham Palace to please you? Do you know also that my mother will think us very extravagant?"

"Ah, we can't all be economical!" said Letty.

He saw the little toss of the head and sharpening of the lips. They only amused him. Though he had never, so far, discussed his mother and her affairs with Letty in any detail, he understood perfectly well that her feeling about this particular house in some way concerned his mother, and that Letty and Lady Tressady were rapidly coming to dislike each other. Well, why should Letty pretend? He liked her the better for not pretending.

There was a movement in the crowd about them, and Letty, looking up, suddenly found herself close to a tall lady, whose dark eyes were bent upon her.

"How do you do, Miss Sewell?"

Letty, a little fluttered, gave her hand and replied. Lady Maxwell glanced across her at the tall young

man, with the fair, irregular face. George bowed involuntarily, and she slightly responded. Then she was swept on by her own party.

"Have you sent for your carriage?" George heard someone say to her.

"No; I am going home in a hansom. I've tired out both the horses to-day. Aldous is going down to the club to see if he can hear anything about Devizes."

"Oh! the election?"

She nodded, then caught sight of her husband at the door beckoning, and hurried on.

"What a head!" said George, looking after her with admiration.

"Yes," said Letty, unwillingly. "It's the hair that's so splendid, the long black waves of it. How ridiculous to talk of tiring out her horses — that's just like her! As though she mightn't have fifty horses if she liked! Oh, George, there's our man! Quick, Tully!"

They made their way out. In the press George put his arm half round Letty, shielding her. The touch of her light form, the nearness of her delicate face, enchanted him. When their carriage had rolled away, and he turned homewards along Piccadilly, he walked absently for a time, conscious only of pulsing pleasure.

It was a mild February night. After a long frost, and a grudging thaw, westerly winds were setting in, and Spring could be foreseen. It had been pouring with rain during the concert, but was now fair, the rushing clouds leaving behind them, as they passed, great torn spaces of blue, where the stars shone.

Gusts of warm moist air swept through the street. As George's moment of intoxication gradually subsided, he felt the physical charm of the soft buffeting wind. How good seemed all living! — youth and capacity — this roaring multitudinous London — the future with its chances! This common pleasant chance of marriage amongst them — he was glad he had put out his hand to it. His wife that was to be was no saint and no philosopher. He thanked the fates! He at least asked for neither — on the hearth. "Praise, blame, love, kisses" — for all of those, life with Letty would give scope; yet for none of them in excess. There would be plenty of room left for other things, other passions — the passion of political power, for instance, the art of dealing with and commanding other men. He, the novice, the beginner, to talk of "commanding!" Yet already he felt his foot upon the ladder. Fontenoy consulted him, and confided in him more and more. In spite of his engagement, he was informing himself rapidly on a hundred questions, and the mental wrestle of every day was exhilarating. Their small group in the House, compact, tireless, audacious, was growing in importance and in the attention it extorted from the public. Never had the whole tribe of factory inspectors shown a more hawk-like, a more inquisitorial, a more intolerable vigilance than during the past twelve months. All the persons concerned with matches and white-lead, with certain chemical or metal-working industries, with "season" dressmaking or tailoring, were up in arms, rallying to Fontenoy's support with loud wrath and lamentations, claiming to speak not only for

themselves, but for their "hands," in the angry protest that things had gone and were going a great deal too far, that trade was simply being harassed out of the country. A Whiggish group of manufacturers on the Liberal side were all with Fontenoy; while the Socialists, on whom the Government should have been able in such a matter to count to the death, had a special grievance against the Cabinet at the moment, and were sulking in their tents. The attack and defence would probably take two nights; for the Government, admitting the gravity of the assault, had agreed, in case the debate should not be concluded on Friday, to give up Monday to it. Altogether the affair would make a noise. George would probably get in his maiden speech on the second night, and was, in truth, devoting a great deal of his mind to the prospect; though to Letty he had persistently laughed at it and belittled it, refusing altogether to let her come and hear him.

Then, after Easter would come Maxwell's Bill, and the fat in the fire! Poor little Letty! — she would get but few of the bridal observances due to her when *that* struggle began. But first would come Easter and their wedding; that one short fortnight, when he would carry her off — soft, willing prey! — to the country, draw a "wind-warm space" about himself and her, and minister to all her whims.

He turned down St. James's Street, passed Marlborough House, and entered the Mall, on the way to Warwick Square, where he was living with his mother.

Suddenly he became aware of a crowd, immediately

in front of him, in the direction of Buckingham Palace. A hansom and horse were standing in the roadway; the driver, crimson and hatless, was bandying words with one of the policemen, who had his notebook open, and from the middle of the crowd came a sound of wailing.

He walked up to the edge of the circle.

"Anybody hurt?" he said to the policeman, as the man shut his notebook.

"Little girl run over, sir."

"Can I be of any assistance? Is there an ambulance coming?"

"No, sir. There was a lady in the hansom. She's just now bandaging the child's leg, and says she'll take it to the hospital."

George mounted on one of the seats under the trees that stood handy, and looked over the heads of the crowd to the space in the centre which the other policeman was keeping clear. A little girl lay on the ground, or rather on a heap of coats; another girl, apparently about sixteen, stood near her, crying bitterly, and a lady —

"Goodness!" said Tressady; and, jumping down, he touched the policeman on the shoulder.

"Can you get me through? I think I could be some help. That lady" — he spoke a word in the policeman's ear.

The man touched his hat.

"Stand back, please!" he said, addressing the crowd, "and let this gentleman through."

The crowd divided unwillingly. But at the same moment it parted from the inside, and a little proces-

sion came through, both policemen joining their energies to make a free passage for it. In front walked the policeman carrying the little girl, a child apparently of about twelve years old. Her right foot lay stiffly across his arm, held straight and still in an impromptu splint of umbrellas and handkerchiefs. Immediately behind came the lady whom George had caught sight of, holding the other girl's hand in hers. She was bareheaded and in evening dress. Her opera-cloak, with its heavy sable collar, showed beneath it a dress of some light-coloured satin, which had already suffered deplorably from the puddles of the road, and, as she neared the lamp beneath which the cab had stopped, the diamonds on her wrists sparkled in the light. During her passage through the crowd, George perceived that one or two people recognised her, and that a murmur ran from mouth to mouth.

Of anything of the sort she herself was totally unconscious. George saw at once that she, not the policeman, was in command. She gave him directions, as they approached the cab, in a quick, imperative voice which left no room for hesitation.

"The driver is drunk," he heard her say; "who will drive?"

"One of us will drive, ma'am."

"What — the other man? Ask him to take the reins at once, please, before I get in. The horse is fresh, and might start. That's right. Now, when I say the word, give me the child."

She settled herself in the cab. George saw the policeman somewhat embarrassed, for a moment, with

his burden. He came forward to his help, and between them they handed in the child, placing her carefully on her protector's knee.

Then, standing at the open door of the cab, George raised his hat. "Can I be of any further assistance to you, Lady Maxwell? I saw you just now at the concert."

She turned in some astonishment as she heard her name, and looked at the speaker. Then, very quickly, she seemed to understand.

"I don't know," she said, pondering. "Yes! you could help me. I am going to take the child to hospital. But there is this other girl. Could you take her home — she is very much upset? No! — first, could you bring her after me to St. George's? She wants to see where we put her sister."

"I will call another cab, and be there as soon as you."

"Thank you. Just let me speak to the sister a moment, please."

He put the weeping girl forward, and Lady Maxwell bent across the burden on her knee to say a few words to her — soft, quick words in another voice. The girl understood, her face cleared a little, and she let Tressady take charge of her.

One of the policemen mounted the box of the hansom, amid the "chaff" of the crowd, and the cab started. A few hats were raised in George's neighbourhood, and there was something of a cheer.

"I tell yer," said a voice, "I knowed her fust sight — seed her picture lots o' times in the papers, and in the winders too. My word, ain't she good-lookin! And did yer see all them diamonds?"

"Come along!" said George, impatiently, hurrying his charge into the four-wheeler the other policeman had just stopped for them.

In a few more seconds he, the girl, and the policeman were pursuing Lady Maxwell's hansom at the best speed of an indifferent horse. George tried to say a few consoling things to his neighbour; and the girl, reassured by his kind manner, found her tongue, and began to chatter in a tearful voice about the how and when of the accident: about the elder sister in a lodging in Crawford Street, Tottenham Court Road, whom she and the little one had been visiting; the grandmother in Westminster with whom they lived; poor Lizzie's place in a laundry, which now she must lose; how the lady had begged handkerchiefs and umbrellas from the crowd to tie up Lizzie's leg with — and so on through a number of other details incoherent or plaintive.

George heard her absently. His mind all the time was absorbed in the dramatic or ironic aspects of what he had just seen. For dramatic they were — though perhaps a little cheap. Could he, could anyone, have made acquaintance with this particular woman in more characteristic fashion? He laughed to think how he would tell the story to Fontenoy. The beautiful creature in her diamonds, kneeling on her satin dress in the mud, to bind up a little laundrymaid's leg — it was so extravagantly in keeping with Marcella Maxwell that it amused one like an overdone coincidence in a clumsy play.

What made her so beautiful? The face had marked defects; but in colour, expression, subtlety of line —

incomparable! On the other hand, the manner — no! — he shrugged his shoulders. The remembrance of its mannish — or should it be, rather, boyish? — energy and assurance somehow set him on edge.

In the end, they were not much behind the hansom; for the hospital porter was only just in the act of taking the injured child from Lady Maxwell as Tressady dismounted and went forward again to see what he could do.

But, somewhat to his chagrin, he was not wanted. Lady Maxwell and the porter did everything. As they went into the hospital, George caught a few of the things she was saying to the porter as she supported the child's leg. She spoke in a rapid, professional way, and the man answered, as the policeman had done, with a deference and understanding which were clearly not due only to her "grand air" and her evening dress. George was puzzled.

He and the elder sister followed her into the waiting-room. The house-surgeon and a nurse were summoned, and the injured leg was put into a splint there and then. The patient moaned and cried most of the time, and Tressady had hard work to keep the sister quiet. Then nurse and doctor lifted the child.

"They are going to put her to bed," said Lady Maxwell, turning to George. "I am going up with them. Would you kindly wait? The sister" — she dropped her business tone, and, smiling, touched the elder girl on the arm — "can come up when the little one is undressed."

The little procession swept away, and George was left with his charge. As soon as the small sister was

out of sight, the elder one began to chatter again out of sheer excitement, crying at intervals. George did not heed her much. He walked up and down, with his hands in his pockets, conscious of a curious irritability. He did not think a woman should take a strange man's service quite so coolly.

At the end of another quarter of an hour a nurse appeared to summon the sister. Tressady was told he might come too if he would, and his charge threw him a quick, timid look, as though asking him not to desert her in this unknown and formidable place. So they followed the nurse up white stone stairs, and through half-lit corridors, where all was silent, save that once a sound of delirious shrieking and talking reached them through a closed door, and made the sister's consumptive little face turn whiter still.

At last the nurse, putting her finger on her lip, turned a handle, and George was conscious of a sudden feeling of pleasure.

They were standing on the threshold of a children's ward. On either hand was a range of beds, bluish-white between the yellow picture-covered walls and the middle-way of spotless floor. Far away, at the other end, a great fire glowed. On a bare table in the centre, laden with bottles and various surgical necessaries, stood a shaded lamp, and beside it the chair where the night-nurse had been sitting. In the beds were sleeping children of various ages, some burrowing, face downward, animal-like, into their pillows; others lying on their backs, painfully straight and still. The air was warm, yet light, and there was the inevitable smell of antiseptics. Something

in the fire-lit space and comfort of the great room, its ordered lines and colours, the gentleness of the shaded light as contrasted with the dim figures in the beds, seemed to make a poem of it — a poem of human tenderness.

Two or three beds away to the right, Lady Maxwell was standing with the night-nurse of the ward. The little girl had been undressed, and was lying quiet, with a drawn, piteous face that turned eagerly as her sister came in. The whole scene was new and touching to Tressady. Yet, after the first impression, his attention was perforce held by Lady Maxwell, and he saw the rest only in relation to her. She had slipped off her heavy cloak, in order, perhaps, that she might help in the undressing of the child. Beneath, she wore a little shawl or cape of some delicate lace over her low dress. The dress itself was of a pale shade of green; the mire and mud with which it was bedabbled no longer showed in the half light; and the satin folds glistened dimly as she moved. The poetic dignity of the head, so finely wreathed with its black hair, of the full throat and falling shoulders, received a sort of special emphasis from the wide spaces, the pale colours and level lines of the ward. Tressady was conscious again of the dramatic significant note as he watched her, yet without any softening of his nascent feeling of antagonism.

She turned and beckoned to the sister as they entered:

"Come and see how comfortable she is! And then you must give this lady your name and address."

The girl timidly approached. Whilst she was

occupied with her sister and with the nurse, Lady Maxwell suddenly looked round, and saw Tressady standing by the table a yard or two from her.

A momentary expression of astonishment crossed her face. He saw that, in her absorption with the case and the two sisters, she had clean forgotten all about him. But in a flash she remembered, and smiled.

"So you are really going to take her home? That is very kind of you. It will make all the difference to the grandmother that somebody should go and explain. You see, they leave her in the splint for the night, and to-morrow they will put the leg in plaster. Probably they won't keep her in hospital more than about three weeks, for they are very full."

"You seem to know all about it!"

"I was a nurse myself once, for a time," she said, but with a certain stiffness which seemed to mark the transition from the professional to the great lady.

"Ah! I should have remembered that. I had heard it from Edward Watton."

She looked up quickly. He felt that for the first time she took notice of him as an individual.

"You know Mr. Watton? I think you are Sir George Tressady, are you not? You got in for Market Malford in November? I recollect. I didn't like your speeches."

She laughed. So did he.

"Yes, I got in just in time for a fighting session."

Her laugh disappeared.

"An odious fight!" she said gravely.

"I am not so sure. That depends on whether you like fighting, and how certain you are of your cause!"

She hesitated a moment; then she said:

"How can Lord Fontenoy be certain of his cause!"

The slight note of scorn roused him.

"Isn't that what all parties say of their opponents?"

She glanced at him again, curiously. He was evidently quite young — younger than herself, she guessed. But his careless ease and experience of bearing, contrasted with his thin boy's figure, attracted her. Her lip softened reluctantly into a smile.

"Perhaps," she said. "Only sometimes, you know, it must be true! Well, evidently we can't discuss it here at one o'clock in the morning — and there is the nurse making signs to me. It is really very good of you. If you are in our neighbourhood on Sunday, will you report?"

"Certainly — with the greatest pleasure. I will come and give you a full account of my mission."

She held out a slim hand. The sister, red-eyed with crying, was handed over to him, and he and she were soon in a cab, speeding towards the Westminster mews whither she directed him.

Well, was Maxwell to be so greatly envied? Tressady was not sure. Such a woman, he thought, for all her beauty, would not have greatly stirred his own pulses.

CHAPTER V

The week which had opened thus for Tressady promised to be one of lively interest for such persons as were either concerned in or took notice of the House of Commons and its doings. Fontenoy's onslaught upon the administration of the Home Office, and, through the Home Secretary, on the Maxwell group and influence, had been long expected, and was known to have been ably prepared. Its possible results were already keenly discussed. Even if it were a damaging attack, it was not supposed that it could have any immediate effect on the state of parties or the strength of the Government. But after Easter Maxwell's factory Bill — a special Factory Act for East London, touching the grown man for the first time, and absolutely prohibiting home-work in certain specified industries — was to be brought forward, and could not fail to provide Maxwell's adversaries with many chances of red and glorious battle. It was disputable from end to end; it had already broken up one Government; it was strongly pressed and fiercely opposed; and on the fate of each clause in Committee might hang the life or death of the Ministry — not so much because of the intrinsic importance of the matter, as because Maxwell was indispensable to the Cabinet, and it was known that neither Maxwell nor his

close friend and henchman, Dowson, the Home Secretary, would accept defeat on any of the really vital points of the Bill.

The general situation was a curious one. Some two years before this time a strong and long-lived Tory Government had come to an end. Since then all had been confusion in English politics. A weak Liberal Government, undermined by Socialist rebellion, had lasted but a short time, to be followed by an equally precarious Tory Ministry, in which Lord Maxwell — after an absence from politics of some four years or so — returned to his party, only to break it up. For he succeeded in imposing upon them a measure in which his own deepest convictions and feelings were concerned, and which had behind it the support of all the more important trade unions. Upon that measure the Ministry fell; but during their short administration Maxwell had made so great an impression upon his own side that when they returned, as they did return, with an enlarged majority, the Maxwell Bill retained one of the foremost places in their programme, and might be said, indeed, at the present moment to hold the centre of the political field.

That field, in the eyes of any middle-aged observer, was in strange disarray. The old Liberal party had been almost swept away; only a few waifs and strays remained, the exponents of a programme that nobody wanted, and of cries that stirred nobody's blood. A large Independent Labour and Socialist party filled the empty benches of the Liberals — a revolutionary, enthusiastic crew, of whom the country was a little frightened, and who were, if the truth were known, a

little frightened at themselves. They had a coherent programme, and represented a formidable "domination" in English life. And that English life itself, in all that concerned the advance and transformation of labour, was in a singularly tossed and troubled state. After a long period of stagnation and comparative industrial peace, storms at home, answering to storms on the Continent, had been let loose, and forces both of reaction and of revolution were making themselves felt in new forms and under the command of new masters.

At the head of the party of reaction stood Fontenoy. Some four years before the present session the circumstances of a great strike in the Midlands — together, no doubt, with some other influence — had first drawn him into public life, had cut him off from racing and all his natural pleasures. The strike affected his father's vast domain in North Mercia: it was marked by an unusual violence on the part of the men and their leaders; and Fontenoy, driven, sorely against his will, to take a part by the fact that his father, the hard and competent administrator of an enormous fortune, happened at the moment to be struck down by illness, found himself before many weeks were over taking it with passion, and emerged from the struggle a changed man. Property must be upheld; low-born disorder and greed must be put down. He sold his race-horses, and proceeded forthwith to throw into the formation of a new party all the doggedness, the astuteness, and the audacity he had been accustomed to lavish upon the intrigues and the triumphs of the Turf.

And now in this new Parliament his immense labour was beginning to tell. The men who followed him had grown in number and improved in quality. They abhorred equally a temporising conservatism and a plundering democracy. They stood frankly for birth and wealth, the Church and the expert. They were the apostles of resistance and negation; they were sworn to oppose any further meddling with trade and the personal liberty of master and workman, and to undo, if they could, some of the meddling that had been already carried through. A certain academic quality prevailed among them, which made them peculiarly sensitive to the absurdities of men who had not been to Oxford or Cambridge; while some, like Tressady, had been travellers, and wore an Imperialist heart upon their sleeve. The group possessed an unusual share of debating and oratorical ability, and they had never attracted so much attention as now that they were about to make the Maxwell Bill their prey.

Meanwhile, for the initiated, the situation possessed one or two points of special interest. Lady Maxwell, indeed, was by this time scarcely less of a political force than her husband. Was her position an illustration of some new power in women's hands, or was it merely an example of something as well known to the Pharaohs as to the nineteenth century — the ability of any woman with a certain physique to get her way? That this particular woman's way happened to be also her husband's way made the case less interesting for some observers. On the other hand,

her obvious wifely devotion attracted simple souls to whom the meddling of women in politics would have been nothing but repellent had it not been recommended to them by the facts that Marcella Maxwell was held to be good as well as beautiful; that she loved her husband; and was the excellent mother of a fine son.

Of her devotion, in the case of this particular Bill, there was neither concealment nor doubt. She was known to have given her husband every assistance in the final drafting of the measure: she had seen for herself the working of every trade that it affected; she had innumerable friends among wage-earners of all sorts, to whom she gave half her social life; and both among them and in the drawing-rooms of the rich she fought her husband's cause unceasingly, by the help of beauty, wits, and something else — a broad impulsiveness and charm — which might be vilified or scorned, but could hardly be matched, by the enemy.

Meanwhile Lord Maxwell was a comparatively ineffective speaker, and passed in social life for a reserved and difficult personality. His friends put no one else beside him; and his colleagues in the Cabinet were well aware that he represented the keystone in their arch. But the man in the street, whether of the aristocratic or plebeian sort, knew comparatively little about him. All of which, combined with the special knowledge of an inner circle, helped still more to concentrate public attention on the convictions, the temperament, and the beauty of his wife.

Amid a situation charged with these personal or dramatic elements the Friday so keenly awaited by Fontenoy and his party arrived.

Immediately after question-time Fontenoy made his speech. In reply, the Home Secretary, suave, statistical, and conciliatory, poured a stream of facts and reports upon the House. The more repulsive they were, the softer and more mincing grew his voice in dealing with them. Fontenoy had excited his audience, Dowson succeeded in making it shudder. Nevertheless, the effect of the evening lay with Fontenoy.

George stayed to hear the official defence to its end. Then he hurried upstairs in search of Letty, who, with Miss Tulloch, was in the Speaker's private gallery. As he went he thought of Fontenoy's speech, its halting opening, the savage force of its peroration. His pulses tingled: "Magnificent!" he said to himself; "*magnificent!* We have found a man!"

Letty was eagerly waiting for him, and they walked down the corridor together. "Well?" he said, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and looking down upon her with a smile. "Well?"

Letty saw that she was expected to praise, and she did her best, his smile still bent upon her. He was perfectly aware all the time of the fatuity of what she was saying. She had caught up since her engagement a certain number of political phrases, and it amused him to note the cheap and tinkling use she made of them. Nevertheless she was chatting, smiling, gesticulating, for his pleasure. She was posing for him, using her grey eyes in these expres-

sive ways, all for him. He thought her the most entertaining plaything: though it did occur to him sometimes that when they were married he would give her instruction.

"Ah, well, you liked it — that's good!" he said at last, interrupting her. "We've begun well, any way. It'll be rather hard, though, to have to speak after that on Monday!"

"As if you need be afraid! You're not, you know — it's only mock modesty. Do you know that Lady Maxwell was sitting two from me?"

"No! Well, how did she like Fontenoy?"

"She never moved after he got up. She pressed her face against that horrid grating, and stared at him all the time. I thought she was very flushed — but that may have been the heat — and in a very bad temper," added Letty, maliciously. "I talked to her a little about your adventure."

"Did she remember my existence?"

"Oh dear, yes! She said she expected you on Sunday. She never asked *me* to come." Letty looked arch. "But then one doesn't expect her to have pretty manners. People say she is shy. But, of course, that is only your friends' way of saying that you're rude."

"She wasn't rude to you?" said George, outwardly eager, inwardly sceptical. "Shall I not go on Sunday?"

"But of course you must go. We shall have to know them. She's not a woman's woman — that's all. Now, are we going to get some dinner, for Tully and I are famishing?"

"Come along, then, and I'll collect the party."

George had asked a few of his acquaintance in the House to meet his betrothed, together with an old General Tressady and his wife who were his distant cousins. The party were to assemble in the room of an under-secretary much given to such hospitable functions; and thither accordingly George led the way.

The room, when they reached it, was already fairly full of people, and alive with talk.

"Another party!" said George, looking round him. "Benson is great at this sort of thing."

"Do you see Lady Maxwell?" said Letty, in his ear.

George looked to his right, and perceived the lady in question. She also recognised him at once, and bowed, but without rising. She was the centre of a group of people, who were gathered round her and the small table on which she was leaning, and they were so deeply absorbed in the conversation that had been going on that they hardly noticed the entrance of Tressady and his companion.

"Leven has a party, you see," said the under-secretary. "Blaythwaite was to have taken them in — couldn't at the last moment; so they had to come in here. This is *your* side of the room! But none of your guests have come yet. Dinner at the House in the winter is a poor sort of business, Miss Sewell. We want the Terrace for these occasions."

He led the young girl to a sofa at the further end of the room, and made himself agreeable, to him the easiest process in the world. He was a fashionable and charming person, in the most irreproachable of

frock-coats, and Letty was soon at her ease with him, and mistress of all her usual arts and graces.

"You know Lady Maxwell?" he said to her, with a slight motion of the head towards the distant group.

Letty replied; and while she and her companion chattered, George, who was standing behind them, watched the other party.

They were apparently in the thick of an argument, and Lady Maxwell, whose hands were lightly clasped on the table in front of her, was leaning forward with the look of one who had just shot her bolt, and was waiting to see how it would strike.

It struck apparently in the direction of her *vis-à-vis*, Sir Frank Leven, for he bent over to her, making a quick reply in a half-petulant boy's voice. He had been three years in the House, but had still the air of an Eton "swell" in his last half.

Lady Maxwell listened to what he had to say, a sort of silent passion in her face all the time — a noble passion nobly restrained.

When he stopped, George caught her reply.

"He has neither *seen* nor *felt* — every sentence showed it — that is all one can say. How can one take his judgment?"

George's mouth twitched. He slipped, smiling, into a place beside Letty. "Did you hear that?" he inquired.

"Fontenoy's speech, of course," said the under-secretary, looking round. "She's pitching into Leven, I suppose. He's as cranky and unsound as he can be. Shouldn't wonder if you got him before long."

He nodded good-temperedly to Tressady, then got

up to speak to a man on the edge of the further group.

"How amusing!" said George, his satirical eyes still watching Lady Maxwell. "How much that set has 'seen and felt' of sweaters, and white-lead workers, and that ilk! Don't they look like it?"

"Who are they?"

Letty was now using all her eyes to find out, and especially for the purpose of carrying away a mental photograph of Lady Maxwell's black hat and dress.

"Oh! the Maxwells' particular friends in the House — most of them as well provided with family and goods as they make 'em: a philanthropic, idealist lot, that yearns for the people, and will be the first to be kicked downstairs when the people gets its own. However, they aren't all quite happy in their minds. Frank Leven there, as Benson says, is decidedly shaky. He is the member for the Maxwells' division — Maxwell, of course, put him in. He has a house there, I believe, and he married Lady Maxwell's great friend, Miss Macdonald — an ambitious little party, they say, who simply insisted on his going into Parliament. Oh, then, Bennett is there — do you see? — the little dark man with a frock-coat and spectacles? He's Lady Maxwell's link with the Independents — oldest workman member — been in the House a long time, so that by now he isn't quite as one-eyed and one-eared as the rest of them. I suppose she hopes to make use of him at critical moments — she takes care to have tools of all sorts. Gracious — listen!"

There was, indeed, a very storm of discussion

sweeping through the rival party. Lady Maxwell's penetrating but not loud voice seemed to pervade it, and her eyes and face, as she glanced from one speaker to another, drew alternately the shafts and the sympathy of the rest.

Tressady made a face.

"I say, Letty, promise me one thing!" His hand stole towards hers. Tully discreetly looked the other way. "Promise me not to be a political woman, there's a dear!"

Letty hastily withdrew her fingers, having no mind at all for caresses in public.

"But I *must* be a political woman — I shall have to be! I know heaps of girls and married women who get up everything in the papers — all the stupidest things — not because they know anything about it, or because they care a rap, but because some of their men friends happen to be members; and when they come to see you, you must know what to talk to them about."

"Must you?" said George. "How odd! As though one went to tea with a woman for the sake of talking about the very same things you have been doing all day, and are probably sick to death of already."

"Never mind," said Letty, with her little air of sharp wisdom. "I *know* they do it, and I shall have to do it too. I shall pick it up."

"Will you? Of course you will! Only, when I've got a big Bill on, let me do a little of it for myself — give me some of the credit!"

Letty laughed maliciously.

"I don't know why you've taken such a dislike to her," she said, but in rather a contented tone, as her eye once more travelled across to Lady Maxwell. "Does she trample on her husband, after all?"

Tressady gave an impatient shrug.

"Trample on him? Goodness, no! That's all part of the play, too — wifely affection and the rest of it. Why can't she keep out of sight a little? We don't want the women meddling."

"Thank you, my domestic tyrant!" said Letty, making him a little bow.

"How much tyranny will you want before you accept those sentiments?" he asked her, smiling tenderly into her eyes. Both had a moment's pleasant thrill; then George sprang up.

"Ah, here they are at last! — the General, and all the lot. Now, I hope, we shall get some dinner."

Tressady had, of course, to introduce his elderly cousins and his three or four political friends to his future wife; and, amid the small flutter of the performance, the break-up and disappearance of the rival party passed unnoticed. When Tressady's guests entered the dining-room which looks on the terrace, and made their way to the top table reserved for them, the Leven dinner, near the door, was already half through.

George's little banquet passed merrily enough. The grey-haired General and his wife turned out to be agreeable and well-bred people, quite able to repay George's hospitality by the dropping of little compliments on the subject of Letty into his half-yielded ear. For his way of taking such things was always a

trifle cynical. He believed that people say habitually twice what they mean, whether in praise or blame; and he did not feel that his own view of Letty was much affected by what other people thought of her.

So, at least, he would have said. In reality, he got a good deal of pleasure out of his *fiancée's* success. Letty, indeed, was enjoying herself greatly. This political world, as she had expected, satisfied her instinct for social importance better than any world she had yet known. She was determined to get on in it; nor, apparently, was there likely to be any difficulty in the matter. George's friends thought her a pretty, lively creature, and showed the usual inclination of the male sex to linger in her society. She mostly wanted to be informed as to the House and its ways. It was all so new to her! — she said. But her ignorance was not insipid; her questions had flavour. There was much talk and laughter; Letty felt herself the mistress of the table, and her social ambitions swelled within her.

Suddenly George's attention was recalled to the Maxwell table by the break-up of the group around it. He saw Lady Maxwell rise and look round her as though in search of someone. Her eyes fell upon him, and he involuntarily rose at the same instant to meet the step she made towards him.

"I must say another word of thanks to you" — she held out her hand. "That girl and her grandmother were most grateful to you."

"Ah, well! — I must come and make my report. Sunday, I think you said?"

She assented. Then her expression altered:

"When do you speak?"

The question fell out abruptly, and took George by surprise.

"I?" On Monday, I believe, if I get my turn. But I fear the British Empire will go on if I don't!"

She threw a glance of scrutiny at his thin, whimsical face, with its fair moustache and sunburnt skin.

"I hear you are a good speaker," she said simply. "And you are entirely with Lord Fontenoy?"

He bowed lightly, his hands on his sides.

"You'll agree our case was well put? The worst of it—"

Then he stopped. He saw that Lady Maxwell had ceased to listen to him. She turned her head towards the door, and, without even saying good-bye to him, she hurried away from him towards the further end of the room.

"Maxwell, I see!" said Tressady to himself, with a shrug, as he returned to his seat. "Not flattering—but rather pretty, all the same!"

He was thinking of the quick change that had remade the face while he was talking to her—a change as lovely as it was unconscious.

Lord Maxwell, indeed, had just entered the dining-room in search of his wife, and he and she now left it together, while the rest of the Leven party gradually dispersed. Letty also announced that she must go home.

"Let me just go back into the House and see what is going on," said George. "Ten to one I sha'n't be wanted, and I could see you home."

He hurried off, only to return in a minute with the

news that the debate was given up to a succession of superfluous people, and he was free, at any rate for an hour. Letty, Miss Tulloch, and he accordingly made their way to Palace Yard. A bright moon shone in their faces as they emerged into the open air, which was still mild and spring-like, as it had been all the week.

"I say — send Miss Tulloch home in a cab!" George pleaded in Letty's ear, "and walk with me a bit. Come and look at the moon over the river. I will bring you back to the bridge and put you in a cab."

Letty looked astonished and demure. "Aunt Charlotte would be shocked," she said.

George grew impatient, and Letty, pleased with his impatience, at last yielded. Tully, the most complaisant of chaperons, was put into a hansom and despatched.

As the pair reached the entrance of Palace Yard they were overtaken by a brougham, which drew up an instant in the gateway itself, till it should find an opening in the traffic outside.

"Look!" said George, pressing Letty's arm.

She looked round hurriedly, and, as the lamps of the gateway shone into the carriage, she caught a vivid glimpse of the people inside it. Their faces were turned towards each other as though in intimate conversation — that was all. The lady's hands were crossed on her knee; the man held a despatch-box. In a minute they were gone; but both Letty and George were left with the same impression — the sense of something exquisite surprised. It had already

visited George that evening, only a few minutes earlier, in connection with the same woman's face.

Letty laughed, rather consciously.

George looked down upon her as he guided her through the gate.

"Some people seem to find it pleasant to be together!" he said, with a vibration in his voice. "But why did we look?" he added, discontentedly.

"How could we help it, you silly boy?"

They walked towards the bridge and down the steps, happy in each other, and freshened by the night breeze. Over the river the moon hung full and white, and beneath it everything — the silver tracks on the water, the blaze of light at Charing Cross Station, the lamps on Westminster Bridge and in the passing steamers, a train of barges, even the darkness of the Surrey shore — had a gentle and poetic air. The vast city had, as it were, veiled her greatness and her tragedy; she offered herself kindly and protectingly to these two — to their happiness and their youth.

George made his companion wait beside the parapet and look, while he himself drew in the air with a sort of hunger.

"To think of the hours we spend in this climate," he said, "caged up in abominable places like the House of Commons!"

The traveller's distaste for the monotony of town and indoor life spoke in his vehemence. Letty raised her eyebrows.

"I am very glad of my furs, thank you! You seem to forget that it is February."

"Never mind! — since Monday it has had the feel of April. Did you see my mother to-day?"

"Yes. She caught me just after luncheon, and we talked for an hour."

"Poor darling! I ought to have been there to protect you. But she vowed she would have her say about that house."

He looked down upon her, trying to see her expression in the shifting light. He had gone through a disagreeable little scene with his mother at breakfast. She had actually lectured him on the rashness of taking the Brook Street house! — he understanding the whole time that what the odd performance really meant was, that if he took it he would have a smaller margin of income wherefrom to supplement her allowance.

"Oh, it was all right!" said Letty, composedly. "She declared we should get into difficulties at once, that I could have no idea of the value of money, that you always *had* been extravagant, that everybody would be astonished at our doing such a thing, etcetera, etcetera. I *think* — you don't mind? — I think she cried a little. But she wasn't really very unhappy."

"What did you say?"

"Well, I suggested that when we were married, we and she should both set up account-books; and I promised faithfully that if she would let us see hers, we would let her see ours."

George threw back his head with a gurgle of laughter.

"Well?"

"She was afraid," said Letty, demurely, "that I

didn't take things seriously enough. Then I asked her to come and see my gowns."

"And that, I suppose, appeased her?"

"Not at all. She turned up her nose at everything, by way of punishing me. You see, she had on a new Worth — the third since Christmas. My poor little trousseau rags had no chance."

"H'm!" said George, meditatively. "I wonder how my mamma is going to manage when we are married," he added, after a pause.

Letty made no reply. She was walking firmly and briskly; her eyes, full of a sparkling decision, looked straight before her; her little mouth was close set. Meanwhile through George's mind there passed a number of fragmentary answers to his own question. His feeling towards his mother was wholly abnormal; he had no sense of any unseemliness in the conversation about her which was gradually growing common between himself and Letty; and he meant to draw strict lines in the future. At the same time, there was the tie of old habit, and of that uneasy and unwelcome responsibility with regard to her which had descended upon him at the time of his father's death. He could not honestly regard himself as an affectionate son; but the filial relationship, even in its most imperfect aspect, has a way of imposing itself.

"Ah, well! I daresay we shall pull through," he said, dismissing the familiar worry with a long breath. "Why, how far we have come!" he added, looking back at Charing Cross and the Westminster towers. "And how extraordinarily mild it is! We can't turn back yet, and you'll be tired if I race you on in this

way. Look, Letty, there's a seat! Would you be afraid — just five minutes?"

Letty looked doubtful.

"It's so absurdly late. George, you *are* funny! Suppose somebody came by who knew us?"

He opened his eyes.

"And why not? But see! there isn't a carriage, and hardly a person, in sight. Just a minute!"

Most unwillingly Letty let herself be persuaded. It seemed to her a foolish and extravagant thing to do; and there was now no need for either folly or extravagance. Since her engagement she had dropped a good many of the small audacities of the social sort she had so freely allowed herself before it. It was as though, indeed, now that these audacities had served their purpose, some stronger and perhaps inherited instincts emerged in her, obscuring the earlier self. George was sometimes astonished by an ultra-conventional note, of which certainly he had heard nothing in their first days of intimacy at Malford.

However, she sat down beside him, protesting. But he had no sooner stolen her hand, than the moonlight showed her a dark, absent look creeping over his face. And to her amazement he began to talk about the House of Commons, about the Home Secretary's speech, of all things in the world! He seemed to be harking back to Mr. Dowson's arguments, to some of the stories the Home Secretary had told of those wretched people who apparently enjoy dying of overwork and phosphorus, and white-lead, who positively will die of them, unless the inspectors are always harrying them. He still held her hand, but she saw

he was not thinking of her; and a sudden pique rose in her small mind. Generally, she accepted his love-making very coolly — just as it came, or did not come. But to-night she asked herself with irritation — for what had he led her into his silly escapade, but to make love to her? And now here were her fingers slipping out of his, while he harangued her on things she knew and cared nothing about, in a voice and manner he might have addressed to anybody!

"Well, I don't understand — I really *don't!*" she interrupted sharply. "I thought you were all against the Government — I thought you didn't believe a word they say!"

He laughed.

"The difference between them and us, darling, is only that *they* think the world can be mended by Act of Parliament, and *we* think it can't. Do what you will, *we* say the world is, and must be, a wretched hole for the majority of those that live in it; *they* suppose they can cure it by quack meddlings and tyrannies."

He looked straight before him, absorbed, and she was struck with the harsh melancholy of his face.

What on earth had he kept her here for to talk this kind of talk!

"George, I really *must* go!" she began, flushing, and drawing her hand away.

Instantly he turned to her, his look brightening and melting.

"Must you? Well, the world sha'n't be a wretched hole for us, shall it, darling? We'll make a little nest in it — we'll forget what we can't help — we'll be happy as long as the fates let us — won't we, Letty?"

His arm slipped round behind her. He caught her hands.

He had recollected himself. Nevertheless Letty was keenly conscious that it was all most absurd, this sitting on a seat in a public thoroughfare late at night, and behaving like any 'Arry and 'Arriet.

"Why, of course we shall be happy," she said, rising with decision as she spoke; "only somehow I don't always understand you, George. I wish I knew what you were really thinking about."

"*You!*" he said, laughing, and drawing her hand within his arm, as they turned backwards towards the bridge.

She shook her head doubtfully. Whereupon he awoke fully to the situation, and during the short remainder of their walk he wooed and flattered her as usual. But when he had put her safely into a hansom at the corner of the bridge, and smiled good-bye to her, he turned to walk back to the House in much sudden flatness of mood. Her little restless egotisms of mind and manner had chilled him unawares. Had Fontenoy's speech been so fine, after all? Were politics — was anything — quite worth while? It seemed to him that all emotions were small, all crises disappointing.

CHAPTER VI

The following Sunday, somewhere towards five o'clock, George rang the bell of the Maxwells' house in St. James's Square. It was a very fine house, and George's eye, as he stood waiting, ran over the façade with an amused, investigating look.

He allowed himself the same expression once or twice in the hall, as one mute and splendid person relieved him of his coat, and another, equally mute and equally unsurpassable, waited for him on the stairs, while across a passage beyond the hall he saw two red-liveried footmen carrying tea.

"When one is a friend of the people," he pondered as he went upstairs, "is one limited in horses but not in flunkeys? These things are obscure."

He was ushered first into a stately outer drawing-room, filled with old French furniture and fine pictures; then the butler lifted a velvet curtain, pronounced the visitor's name with a voice and emphasis as perfectly trained as the rest of him, and stood aside for George to enter.

He found himself on the threshold of a charming room looking west, and lit by some last beams of February sun. The pale-green walls were covered with a medley of prints and sketches. A large writing-table, untidily heaped with papers, stood conspicuous on the

blue self-coloured carpet, which over a great part of the floor was pleasantly void and bare. Flat earthenware pans, planted with hyacinths and narcissus, stood here and there, and filled the air with spring scents. Books ran round the lower walls, or lay piled wherever there was a space for them; while about the fire at the further end was gathered a circle of chintz-covered chairs — chairs of all shapes and sizes, meant for talking. The whole impression of the pretty, disorderly place, compared with the stately drawing-room behind it, was one of intimity and freedom; the room made a friend of you as you entered.

Half a dozen people were sitting with Lady Maxwell when Tressady was announced. She rose to meet him with great cordiality, introduced him to little Lady Leven, an elfish creature in a cloud of fair hair, and with a pleasant "You know all the rest," offered him a chair beside herself and the tea-table.

"The rest" were Frank Leven, Edward Watton, Bayle, the Foreign Office private secretary who had been staying at Malford House at the time of Tressady's election, and Bennett, the "small, dark man" whom George had pointed out to Letty in the House as a Labour member, and one of the Maxwells' particular friends.

"Well?" said Lady Maxwell, turning to her new visitor as she handed him some tea, "were you as much taken with the grandmother as the grandmother was taken with you? She told me she had never seen a 'more haffable gentleman, nor one as she'd a been more willin to ha done for'!"

George laughed. "I see," he said, "that my report has been anticipated."

"Yes — I have been there. I have found a 'case' in them indeed — alack! The granny — I am afraid she is an unseemly old woman — and the elder girl both work for the Jew son-in-law on the first floor — home-work of the most abominable kind — that girl will be dead in a year if it goes on."

George was rapidly conscious of two contradictory impressions — one of pleasure, one of annoyance — pleasure in her tall, slim presence, her white hand, and all the other flashing points of a beauty not to be denied — and irritation that she should have talked "shop" to him with her first breath. Could one never escape this altruistic chatter?

But he was not left to grapple with it alone, for Lady Leven looked up quickly.

"Mr. Watton, will you please take Lady Maxwell's tea away if she mentions the word 'case' again? We gave her fair warning."

Lady Maxwell hastily clasped both her hands round her tea-cup.

"Betty, we have discussed the opera for at least twenty minutes."

"Yes — at peril of our lives!" said Lady Leven. "I never talked so fast before. One felt as though one *must* say everything one had to say about Melba and the de Reszkes, all in one breath — before one's poor little subject was torn from one — one would never have such a chance again."

Lady Maxwell laughed, but coloured too.

"Am I such a nuisance?" she said, dropping her

hands on her knee with a little sigh. Then she turned to Tressady.

"But Lady Leven really makes it out worse than it is. We haven't even *approached* a Factory Act all the afternoon."

Lady Leven sprang forward in her chair. "Because! *because*, my dear, we simply declined to let you. We made a league — didn't we, Mr. Bennett? — even you joined it."

Bennett smiled.

"Lady Maxwell overworks herself — we all know that," he said, his look, at once kind, honest, and perennially embarrassed, passing from Lady Leven to his hostess.

"Oh, don't sympathise, for Heaven's sake!" cried Betty. "Wage war upon her — it's our only hope."

"Don't you think Sunday at least ought to be frivolous?" said Tressady, smiling, to Lady Maxwell.

"Well, personally, I like to talk about what interests me on Sunday as well as on other days," she said with a frank simplicity; "but I know I ought to be kept in order — I become a terrible bore."

Frank Leven roused himself from the sofa on which he had languidly subsided.

"Bores?" he said indignantly, "we're all bores. We all have been bores since people began to think about what they're pleased to call 'social work.' Why should I love my neighbour? — I'd much rather hate him. I generally do."

"Doesn't it all depend," said Tressady, "on whether he happens to be able to make it disagreeable for you in return?"

"That's just it," said Betty Leven, eagerly. "I agree with Frank — it's all so stupid, this 'loving' everybody. It makes one positively hot. We sit under a clergyman, Frank and I, who talks of nothing every Sunday but love — *love* — like that, long-drawn-out — how our politics should be 'love,' and our shopping should be 'love' — till we long simply to bastinado somebody. I want to have a little real nice cruelty — something sharp and interesting. I should like to stick pins into my maid, only unfortunately, as she has more than once pointed out to me, it would be so much easier for her to stick them into me!"

"You want the time of Miss Austen's novels back again," said young Bayle, stooping to her, with his measured and agreeable smile — "before even the clergy had a mission."

"Ah! but it would be no good," said Lady Leven, sighing, "if *she* were there!"

She threw out her small hand towards her hostess, and everybody laughed.

Up to the moment of the laugh, Lady Maxwell had been lying back in her chair listening, the beautiful mouth absently merry, and the eyes speaking — Tressady thought — of quite other things, of some hidden converse of her own, going on in the brain behind the eyes. A certain prophetess-air seemed natural to her. Nevertheless, that first impression of her he had carried away from the hospital scene was being somehow blurred and broken up.

She joined in the laugh against herself; then, with a little nod towards her assailant, she said to Edward Watton, who was sitting on her right hand —

"*You're* not taken in, I know."

"Oh, if you mean that I go in for 'cases' and 'causes' too," cried Lady Leven, interrupting, "of course I do — I can't be left alone. I must dance as my generation pipes."

"Which means," said her husband, drily, "that she went for two days filling soda-water bottles the week before last, and a day's shirt-making last week. From the first, I was told that she would probably return to me with an eye knocked out, she being totally inexperienced and absurdly rash. As to the second, to judge from the description she gave me of the den she had been sitting in when she came home, and the headache she had next day, I still expect typhoid. The fortnight isn't up till Wednesday."

There was a shout of mingled laughter and inquiry.

"How did you do it? — and whom did you bribe?" said Bayle to Lady Leven.

"I didn't bribe anybody," she said indignantly. "You don't understand. My friends introduced me."

Then, drawn out by him, she plunged into a lively account of her workshop experiences, interrupted every now and then by the sarcastic comments of her husband and the amusement of the two younger men who had brought their chairs close to her. Betty Leven ranked high among the lively chatterboxes of her day and set.

Lady Maxwell, however, had not laughed at Frank Leven's speech. Rather, as he spoke of his wife's experiences, her face had clouded, as though the blight of some too familiar image, some sad ever-present vision, had descended upon her.

Bennett also did not laugh. He watched the Levens indulgently for a few minutes, then insensibly he, Lady Maxwell, Edward Watton, and Tressady drew together into a circle of their own.

"Do you gather that Lord Fontenoy's speech on Friday has been much taken up in the country?" said Bennett, bending forward and addressing Lady Maxwell. Tressady, who was observing him, noticed that his dress was precisely the "Sunday best" of the respectable workman, and was, moreover, reminded by the expression of the eyes and brow that Bennett was said to have been a well-known "local preacher" in his north-country youth.

Lady Maxwell smiled, and pointed to Tressady.

"Here," she said, "is Lord Fontenoy's first-lieutenant."

Bennett looked at George.

"I should be glad," he said, "to know what Sir George thinks?"

"Why, certainly — we think it has been very warmly taken up," said George, promptly — "to judge from the newspapers, the letters that have been pouring in, and the petitions that seem to be preparing."

Lady Maxwell's eyes gleamed. She looked at Bennett silently a moment, then she said:

"Isn't it amazing to you how strong an impossible case can be made to look?"

"It is inevitable," said Bennett, with a little shrug, "quite inevitable. These social experiments of ours are so young — there is always a strong case to be made out against any of them, and there will be for years to come."

"Well and good," said George; "then we cavillers are inevitable too. Don't attack us — praise us rather; by your own confession, we are as much a part of the game as you are."

Bennett smiled slightly, but did not in reality quite follow. Lady Maxwell bent forward.

"Do you know whether Lord Fontenoy has any *personal* knowledge of the trades he was speaking about?" she said, in her rich eager voice; "that is what I want so much to find out."

George was nettled by both the question and the manner.

"I regard Fontenoy as a very competent person," he said drily. "I imagine he did his best to inform himself. But there was not much need; the persons concerned — whom you think you are protecting — were so very eager to inform us!"

Lady Maxwell flushed.

"And you think that settles it — the eagerness of the cheap life to be allowed to maim and waste itself? But again and again English law has stepped in to prevent it — and again and again everybody has been thankful."

"It is all a question of balance, of course," said George. "Must a few unwise people be allowed to kill themselves — or thousands lose their liberty?"

His blue eyes scanned her beautiful impetuous face with a certain cool hardness. Internally he was more and more in revolt against a "monstrous regiment of women" and the influence upon the most complex economic problems of such a personality as that before him.

But his word "liberty" pricked her. The look of feeling passed away. Her eyes kindled as sharply and drily as his own.

"Freedom?—let me quote you Cromwell! 'Every sectary saith, "O give me liberty!" But give it him, and to the best of his power he will yield it to no one else.' So with your careless or brutal employer—give him liberty, and no one else shall get it."

"Only by metaphor—not legally," said George, stubbornly. "So long as men are not slaves by law there is always a chance for freedom. Any way *we* stand for freedom—as an end, not a means. It is not the business of the State to make people happy—not at all!—at least that is our view—but it *is* the business of the State to keep them free."

"Ah!" said Bennett, with a long breath, "there you've hit the nail—the whole difference between you and us."

George nodded. Lady Maxwell did not speak immediately. But George was conscious that he was being observed, closely considered. Their glances crossed an instant, in antagonism, certainly, if not in dislike.

"How long is it since you came home from India?" she asked him suddenly.

"About six months."

"And you were, I think, a long time abroad?"

"Nearly four years. Does that make you think I have not had much time to get up the things I am going to vote about?" said the young man, laughing. "I don't know! On the broadest issues of politics, one makes up one's mind as well in Asia as in Europe—better perhaps."

"On the Empire, I suppose — and England's place in the world? That's a side which — I know — I remember much too little. You think our life depends on a governing class — and that *we* and democracy are weakening that class too much?"

"That's about it. And for democracy it is all right. But *you* — you are the traitors!"

His thrust, however, did not rouse her to any corresponding rhetoric. She smiled merely, and began to question him about his travels. She did it with great deftness, so that after an answer or two both his temper and manner insensibly softened, and he found himself talking with ease and success. His mixed personality revealed itself — his capacity for certain veiled enthusiasms, his respect for power, for knowledge, his pessimist beliefs as to the average lot of men.

Bennett, who listened easily, was glad to help her make her guest talk. Frank Leven left the group near the sofa and came to listen, too. Tressady was more and more spurred, carried out of himself. Lady Maxwell's fine eyes and stately ways were humanised after all by a quick responsiveness, which for most people, however critical, made conversation with her draw like a magnet. Her intelligence, too, was competent, left the mere feminine behind in these connections that Tressady offered her, no less than in others. She had not lived in the world of high politics for nearly five years for nothing; so that unconsciously, and indeed quite against his will, Tressady found himself talking to her, after a while, as though she had been a man and an equal, while at the same time

taking more pains than he would ever have taken for a man.

"Well, you *have* seen a lot!" said Frank Leven at last, with a rather envious sigh.

Bennett's modest face suddenly reddened.

"If only Sir George will use his eyes to as good purpose at home—" he said involuntarily, then stopped. Few men were more unready and awkward in conversation; yet when roused he was one of the best platform speakers of his day.

George laughed.

"One sees best what appeals to one, I am afraid," he said, only to be instantly conscious that he had made a rather stupid admission in face of the enemy.

Lady Maxwell's lip twitched; he saw the flash of some quick thought cross her face. But she said nothing.

Only when he got up to go, she bade him notice that she was always at home on Sundays, and would be glad that he should remember it. He made a rather cold and perfunctory reply. Inwardly he said to himself, "Why does she say nothing of Letty, whom she knows—and of our marriage—if she wants to make friends?"

Nevertheless, he left the house with the feeling of one who has passed an hour not of the common sort. He had done himself justice, made his mark. And as for her—in spite of his flashes of dislike he carried away a strong impression of something passionate and vivid that clung to the memory. Or was it merely eyes and pose, that astonishingly beautiful colour, and touch of classic dignity which she got—so the world

said — from some remote strain of Italian blood? Most probably! All the same, she had fewer of the ordinary womanly arts than he had imagined. How easy it would have been to send that message to Letty she had not sent! He thought simply that for a clever woman she might have been more adroit.

The door had no sooner closed behind Tressady than Betty Leven, with a quick look after him, bent across to her hostess, and said in a stage whisper:

"Who? Post me up, please."

"One of Fontenoy's gang," said her husband, before Lady Maxwell could answer. "A new member, and as sharp as needles. He's been exactly to all the places where I want to go, Betty, and you won't let me."

He glanced at his wife with a certain sharpness. For Tressady had spoken in passing of nilghai-shooting in the Himalayas, and the remark had brought the flush of an habitual discontent to the young man's cheek.

Betty merely held out a white child's wrist.

"Button my glove, please, and don't talk. I have got ever so many questions to ask Marcella."

Leven applied himself rather sulkily to his task while Betty pursued her inquiries.

"Isn't he going to marry Letty Sewell?"

"Yes," said Lady Maxwell, opening her eyes rather wide. "Do you know her?"

"Why, my dear, she's Mr. Watton's cousin — isn't she?" said Betty, turning towards that young man. "I saw her once at your mother's."

"Certainly she is my cousin," said that young man, smiling, "and she is going to marry Tressady at

Easter. So much I can vouch for, though I don't know her so well, perhaps, as the rest of my family do."

"Oh!" said Betty, drily, releasing her husband and crossing her small hands across her knee. "That means — Miss Sewell isn't one of Mr. Watton's *favourite* cousins. You don't mind talking about your cousins, do you? You may blacken the character of all mine. Is she nice?"

"Who — Letty? Why, of course she is nice," said Edward Watton, laughing. "All young ladies are."

"Oh goodness!" said Betty, shaking her halo of gold hair. "Commend me to cousins for letting one down easy."

"Too bad, Lady Leven!" said Watton, getting up to escape. "Why not ask Bayle? He knows all things. Let me hand you over to him. He will sing you all my cousin's charms."

"Delighted!" said Bayle as he, too, rose — "only unfortunately I ought at this moment to be at Wimbledon."

He had the air of a typical official, well dressed, suave, and infinitely self-possessed, as he held out his hand — deprecatingly — to Lady Leven.

"Oh! you private secretaries!" said Betty, pouting and turning away from him.

"Don't abolish us," he said, pleading. "We must live."

"*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité!*" said Betty, over her shoulder.

"Betty, what a babe you are!" cried her husband, as Bayle, Watton, and Bennett all disappeared together.

"Not at all!" cried Betty. "I wanted to get some truth out of somebody. For, of course, the real truth is that this Miss Sewell is —"

"Is what?" said Leven, lost in admiration all the time, as Lady Maxwell saw, of his wife's dainty grace and rose-leaf colour.

"Well — a — *minx!*" said Betty, with innocent slowness, opening her blue eyes very wide; "a mischievous — rather pretty — hard-hearted — flirting — little minx!"

"Really, Betty!" cried Lady Maxwell. "Where have you seen her?"

"Oh, I saw her last year several times at the Wattons' and other places," said Betty, composedly. "And so did you too, please, madam. I remember very well one day Mrs. Watton brought her into the Winterbournes' when you and I were there, and she chattered a great deal."

"Oh yes! — I had forgotten."

"Well, my dear, you'll soon have to remember her! so you needn't talk in that lofty tone. For they're going to be married at Easter, and if you want to make friends with the young man, you'll have to realise the wife!"

"Married at Easter? How do you know?"

"In the first place Mr. Watton said so, in the next there are such things as newspapers. But of course you didn't notice such trifles, you never do."

"Betty, you're very cross with me to-day!" Lady Maxwell looked up at her friend with a little pleading air.

"Oh no! only for your good. I know you're think-

ing of nothing in the world but how to make that man take a reasonable view of Maxwell's Bill. And I want to impress upon you that *he's* probably thinking a great deal more about getting married than about Factory Bills. You see, *your* getting married was a kind of accident. But other people are different. And oh, dear, you do know so little about them when they don't live in four pair backs! There, don't defend yourself — you sha'n't!"

And, stooping, Betty stifled her friend's possible protest by kissing her.

"Now then, come along, Frank — you've got your speech to write — and I've got to copy it out. Don't swear! you know you're going to have two whole days' golfing next week. Good-bye, Marcella! My love to Aldous — and tell him not to be so late next time I come to tea. Good-bye!"

And off she swept, pausing, however, on the landing to open the door again and put in an eager face.

"Oh! and, by the way, the young man has a mother — Frank reminded me. His womenkind don't seem to be his strong point — but as she doesn't earn *even* four-and-sixpence a week — very sadly the contrary — I won't tell you any more now, or you'll forget. Next time!"

When Marcella Maxwell was at last left alone, she began to pace slowly up and down the large bare room, as it was very much her wont to do.

She was thinking of George Tressady, and of the personality his talk had seemed to reveal.

"His heart is all in *power* — in what he takes for

magnificence," she said to herself. "He talks as if he had no humanity, and did not care a rap for anybody. But it is a pose — I *think* it is a pose. He is interesting — he will develop. One would like — to show him things."

After another pensive turn or two she stopped beside a photograph that stood upon her writing-table. It was a photograph of her husband — a tall, smooth-faced man, with pleasant eyes, features of no particular emphasis, and the free carriage of the country-bred Englishman. As she looked at it her face relaxed unconsciously, inevitably; under the stimulus of some habitual and secret joy. It was for his sake, for his sake only that she was still thinking of George Tressady, still pondering the young man's character and remarks.

So much at least was true — no other member of Fontenoy's party had as yet given her even the chance of arguing with him. Once or twice in society she had tried to approach Fontenoy himself, to get somehow into touch with him. But she had made no way. Lord Fontenoy had simply turned his square-jawed face and red-rimmed eyes upon her with a stupid irresponsive air, which Marcella knew perfectly well to be a mask, while it protected him none the less effectively for that against both her eloquence and her charm. The other members of the party were young aristocrats, either of the ultra-exclusive or of the sporting type. She had made her attempts here and there among them, but with no more success. And once or twice, when she had pushed her attack to close quarters, she had been suddenly conscious of an underlying

insolence in her opponent — a quick glance of bold or sensual eyes which seemed to relegate the mere woman to her place.

But this young Tressady, for all his narrowness and bitterness, was of a different stamp — or she thought so.

She began to pace up and down again, lost in reverie, till after a few minutes she came slowly to a stop before a long Louis Quinze mirror — her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes half consciously studying what she saw.

Her own beauty invariably gave her pleasure — though very seldom for the reasons that would have affected other women. She felt instinctively that it made life easier for her than it could otherwise have been: that it provided her with a natural and profitable "opening" in any game she might wish to play: and that even among the workmen, unionist leaders, and officials of the East End it had helped her again and again to score the points that she wanted to make. She was accustomed to be looked at, to be the centre, to feel things yielding before her; and without thinking it out, she knew perfectly well what it was she gained by this "fair seeming show" of eye and lip and form. Somehow it made nothing seem impossible to her; it gave her a dazzling self-confidence.

The handle of the door turned. She looked round with a smiling start, and waited.

A tall man in a grey suit came in, crossed the room quickly, and put his arms round her. She leant back against his shoulder, putting up one hand to touch his cheek caressingly.

"Why, how late you are! Betty left reproaches for you."

"I had a walk with Dowson. Then two or three people caught me on the way back — Rashdell among others." (Lord Rashdell was Foreign Secretary.) "There are some interesting telegrams from Paris — I copied them out for you."

The country happened to be at the moment in the midst of one of its periodical difficulties with France. There had been a good deal of diplomatic friction, and a certain amount of anxiety at the Foreign Office. Marcella lit the silver kettle again and made her man some fresh tea, while he told her the news, and they discussed the various points of the telegrams he had copied for her, with a comrade's freedom and vivacity. Then she said:

"Well, I have had an interesting time too! That young Tressady has been to tea."

"Oh! has he? They say there is a lot of stuff in him, and he may do us a great deal of mischief. How did you find him?"

"Oh, very clever, very limited — and a mass of prejudices," she said, laughing. "I never saw an odder mixture of knowledge and ignorance."

"What? Knowledge of India and the East? — that kind of thing?"

She nodded.

"Knowledge of everything except the subject he has come home to fight about! Do you know, Aldous — "

She paused. She was sitting on a stool beside him, her arm upon his knee.

"What do I know?" he said, his hand seeking hers.

"Well, I can't help feeling that that man might live and learn. He isn't a mere obstructive block — like the rest."

Maxwell laughed.

"Then Fontenoy is not as shrewd as usual. They say he regards him as their best recruit."

"Never mind. I rather wish you'd try to make friends with him."

Maxwell, however, helped himself to cake and made no response. On the two or three occasions on which he had met George Tressady, he had been conscious, if the truth were told, of a certain vague antipathy to the young man.

Marcella pondered.

"No," she said, "no — I don't think after all he's your sort. Suppose *I* see what can be done!"

And she got up with her flashing smile — half love, half fun — and crossed the room to summon her little boy, Hallin, for his evening play. Maxwell looked after her, not heeding at all what she was saying, heeding only herself, her voice, the atmosphere of charm and life she carried with her.

CHAPTER VII

Marcella Maxwell, however, had not been easily wooed by the man who now filled all the horizon of her life. At the time when Aldous Raeburn, as he then was — the grandson and heir of old Lord Maxwell — came across her first she was a handsome, undeveloped girl, of a type not uncommon in our modern world, belonging by birth to the country-squire class, and by the chances of a few years of student life in London to the youth that takes nothing on authority, and puts to fierce question whatever it finds already on its path — Governments, Churches, the powers of family and wealth — that takes, moreover, its social pity for the only standard, and spends that pity only on one sort and type of existence. She accepted Raeburn, then the best *parti* in the county, without understanding or loving him, simply that she might use his power and wealth for certain social ends to which the crude philanthropy of her youth had pledged itself. Naturally, they were no sooner engaged than Raeburn found himself launched upon a long wrestle with the girl who had thus — in the selfishness of her passionate idealist youth — opened her relation to him with a deliberate affront to the heart offered her. The engagement had stormy passages, and was for a time wholly broken off. Aldous was made bitterly jealous,

or miserably unhappy. Marcella left the old house in the neighbourhood of the Maxwell property, where her lover had first seen and courted her. She plunged into London life, and into nursing, that common outlet for the woman at war with herself or society. She suffered and struggled, and once or twice she came very near to throwing away all her chances of happiness. But in the end, Maxwell tamed her; Maxwell recovered her. The rise of love in the unruly, impetuous creature, when the rise came, was like the sudden growth of some great forest flower. It spread with transforming beauty over the whole nature, till at last the girl who had once looked upon him as the mere tool of her own moral ambitions threw herself upon Maxwell's heart with a self-abandoning passion and penitence, which her developed powers and her adorable beauty made a veritable intoxication.

And Maxwell was worthy that she should do this thing. When he and Marcella first met, he was a man of thirty, very able, very reserved, and often painfully diffident as to his own powers and future. He was the only young representative of a famous stock, and had grown up from his childhood under the shadow of great sorrows and heavy responsibilities. The stuff of the poet and the thinker lay hidden behind his shy manners; and he loved Marcella Boyce with all the delicacy, all the idealising respect, that passion generates in natures so strong and so highly tempered. At the same time, he had little buoyancy or gaiety; he had a belief in his class, and a constitutional dislike of change, which were always fighting in his mind with the energies of moral debate; and he acquiesced very

easily - perhaps indifferently — in many outward conventions and prejudices.

The crisis through which Marcella put him developed and matured the man. To the influences of love, moreover, were added the influences of friendship — of such a friendship as our modern time but seldom rears to perfection. In Raeburn's college days, a man of rare and delicate powers had possessed himself of Raeburn's tenacious affection, and had thenceforward played the leader to Raeburn's strength, physical and moral, availing himself freely, wherever his own failed him, of the powers and capacities of his friend. For he himself bore in him from his youth up the seeds of physical failure and early death. It was partly the marvellous struggle in him of soul with body that subdued to him the homage of the stronger man. And it was clearly his influence that broke up and fired Raeburn's slower and more distrustful temper, informing an inbred Toryism, a natural passion for tradition, and the England of tradition with that "repining restlessness" which is the best spur of noble living.

Hallin was a lecturer and an economist; a man who lived in the perception of the great paradox that in our modern world political power has gone to the workman, while yet socially and intellectually he remains little less weak, or starved, or subject than before. When he died he left to Raeburn a legacy of feelings and ideas, all largely concerned with this contrast between the huge and growing "tyranny" of the working class and the individual helplessness or bareness of the working man. And it was these feel-

ings and ideas which from the beginning made a link between Raeburn and the young revolts and compassions of Marcella Boyce. They were at one in their love of Edward Hallin; and after Hallin's death, in their sore and tender wish to make his thoughts tell upon the English world.

The Maxwells had now been married some five years, years of almost incredible happiness. The equal comradeship of marriage at its best and finest, all the daily disciplines, the profound and painless lessons of love, the covetous bliss of parentage, the constant anxieties of power nobly understood, had harmonised the stormy nature of the woman, and had transformed the somewhat pessimist and scrupulous character of the man. Not that life with Marcella Maxwell was always easy. Now as ever she remained on the moral side a creature of strain and effort, tormented by ideals not to be realised, and eager to drive herself and others in a breathless pursuit of them.

But if in some sort she seemed to be always dragging those that loved her through the heart of a tempest, the tempest had such golden moments! No wife had ever more capacity for all the delicacies and depths of passion towards the man of her choice. All the anxieties she brought with her, all the perplexities and difficulties she imposed, had never yet seemed to Maxwell anything but divinely worth while. So far, indeed, he had never even remotely allowed himself to put the question. Her faults were her; and she was his light of life.

For some time after their marriage, which took place

about a year after his accession to the title and estates, they had lived at the stately house in Brookshire belonging to the Maxwells, and Marcella had thrown herself into the management of a large household and property with characteristic energy and originality. She had tried new ways of choosing and governing her servants; new ways of entertaining the poor, and of making Maxwell Court the centre, not of one class, but of all. She ran up a fair score of blunders, but not one of them was the blunder of meanness or vulgarity. Her nature was inventive and poetic, and the rich fulfilment that had overtaken her own personal desires did but sting her eager passion to give and to serve.

Meanwhile the family house in town was sold, and what with the birth of her son, and the multiplicity of the rural interests to which she had set her hand, Marcella felt no need of London. But towards the end of the second year she perceived — though he said little about it — that there was in her husband's mind a strong and persistent drawing towards his former political interests and associations. The late Lord Maxwell had sat in several Conservative cabinets, and his grandson, after a distinguished career in the House as a private member, had accepted a subordinate place in the Government only a few months before his grandfather's death transferred him to the Lords. After that event, a scrupulous conscience had forced him to take landowning as a profession and an arduous one. The Premier made him flattering advances, and his friends remonstrated, but he had none the less relinquished office, and buried himself on his land.

Now, however, after some three years' hard and unremitting work, the estate was in excellent condition; the "new ways" of the new owners had been well started; and both Maxwell and Marcella had fitting lieutenants who could be left in charge. Moreover, matters were being agitated at the moment in politics which had special significance for the man's idealist and reflective mind. His country friends and neighbours hardly understood why.

For it was merely a question of certain further measures of factory reform. A group of labour leaders were pressing upon the public and the Government a proposal to pass a special Factory Act for certain districts and trades of East London. In spite of Commissions, in spite of recent laws, "sweating," so it was urged, was as bad as ever — nay, in certain localities and industries was more frightful and more oppressive than ever. The waste of life and health involved in the great clothing industries of East London, for instance, which had provoked law after law, inquiry after inquiry, still went — so it was maintained — its hideous way.

"Have courage!" cried the reformers. "Take, at last, the only effectual step. Make it penal to practise certain trades in the houses of the people — drive them all into factories of a certain size, where alone these degraded industries can be humanised and controlled. Above all, make up your mind to a legal working day for East London men as well as East London women. Try the great experiment first of all in this omnivorous, inarticulate London, this dustbin for the rubbish of all nations. Here the problem is

worst - here the victims are weakest and most manageable. London will bear what would stir a riot in Birmingham or Leeds. Make the experiment as partial and as tentative as you please — give the Home Office power to extend or revoke it at will — but *try it!*"

The change proposed was itself of vast importance, and was, moreover, but a prelude to things still more far-reaching. But, critical as it was, Maxwell was prepared for it. During the later years of his friend Hallin's life the two men had constantly discussed the industrial consequences of democracy with unflagging eagerness and intelligence. To both it seemed not only inevitable, but the object of the citizen's dearest hopes, that the rule of the people should bring with it, in ever-ascending degree, the ordering and moralising of the worker's toil. Yet neither had the smallest belief that any of the great civilised communities would ever see the State the sole landlord and the sole capitalist; or that Collectivism as a system has, or deserves to have, any serious prospects in the world. To both, possession — private and personal possession — from the child's first toy, or the tiny garden where it sows its passionately watched seeds, to the great business or the great estate, is one of the first and chiefest elements of human training, not to be escaped by human effort, or only at such a cost of impoverishment and disaster that mankind would but take the step — supposing it conceivable that it should take it — to retrace it instantly.

Maxwell's *heart*, however, was much less concerned

with this belief, tenaciously as he held it, than with its relative — the limitation of private possession by the authority of the common conscience. That "we are not our own" has not, indeed, been left to Lassalle or Marx to discover. But if you could have moved this quiet Englishman to speak, he would have said — his strong, brooding face all kindled and alive — that the enormous industrial development of the past century has shown us the forces at work in the evolution of human societies on a gigantic scale, and by thus magnifying them has given us a new understanding of them. The vast extension of the individual will and power which science has brought to humanity during the last hundred years was always present to him as food for a natural exultation — a kind of pledge of the boundless prospects of the race. On the other hand the struggle of society brought face to face with this huge increment of the individual power, forced to deal with it for its own higher and mysterious ends, to moralise and socialise it lest it should destroy itself and the State together; the slow steps by which the modern community has succeeded in asserting itself against the individual, in protecting the weak from his weakness, the poor from his poverty, in defending the woman and child from the fierce claims of capital, in forcing upon trade after trade the axiom that no man may lawfully build his wealth upon the exhaustion and degradation of his fellow — these things stirred in him the far deeper enthusiasms of the moral nature. Nay more! Together with all the other main facts which mark the long travail of man's ethical and social life, they were among the only

"evidences" of religion a critical mind allowed itself — the most striking signs of something "greater than we know" working among the dust and ugliness of our common day. Attack wealth as wealth, possession as possession, and civilisation is undone. But bring the force of the social conscience to bear as keenly and ardently as you may, upon the separate activities of factory and household, farm and office: and from the results you will only get a richer individual freedom, one more illustration of the divinest law man serves — that he must "die to live," must surrender to obtain.

Such at least was Maxwell's persuasion; though as a practical man he admitted, of course, many limitations of time, occasion, and degree. And long companionship with him had impressed the same faith also on Marcella. With the natural conceit of the shrewd woman, she would probably have maintained that her social creed came entirely of mother-wit and her own exertions — her experiences in London, reading, and the rest. In reality it was in her the pure birth of a pure passion. She had learnt it while she was learning to love Aldous Raeburn; and it need astonish no one that the more dependent all her various philosophies of life had become on the mere personal influence and joy of marriage, the more agile had she grown in all that concerned the mere intellectual defence of them. She could argue better and think better; but at bottom, if the truth were told, they were Maxwell's arguments and Maxwell's thoughts.

So that when this particular agitation began, and he grew restless in his silent way, she grew restless

too. They took down the old worn portfolios of Hallin's papers and letters, and looked through them, night after night, as they sat alone together in the great library of the Court. Both Marcella and Aldous could remember the writing of many of these innumerable drafts of Acts, these endless memoranda on special points, and must needs try, for love's sake, to forget the terrible strain and effort with which a dying man had put them together. She was led by them to think of the many workmen friends she had made during the year of her nursing life; while he had remembrances of much personal work and investigation of his own, undertaken during the time of his under-secretaryship, to add to hers. Another Liberal government was slipping to its fall — if a Conservative government came in, with a possible opening in it for Aldous Maxwell, what then? Was the chance to be seized?

One May twilight, just before dinner, as the two were strolling up and down the great terrace just in front of the Court, Aldous paused and looked at the majestic house beside them.

"What's the good of talking about these things while we live *there?*" he said, with a gesture towards the house, half impatient, half humorous.

Marcella laughed. Then she sprang away from him, considering, a sudden brightness in her eye. She had an idea.

The idea after all was a very simple one. But the probability is that, had she not been there to carry him through, Maxwell would have neither found it nor followed it. However that may be, in a very few days she had clothed it with fact, and made so real a

thing of it that she was amazed at her own success. She and Maxwell had settled themselves in a small furnished house in the Mile End Road, and Maxwell was once more studying the problems of his measure that was to be in the midst of the populations to whom it applied. The house had been recently let in "apartments" by a young tradesman and his wife, well known to Marcella. In his artisan days the man had been her friend, and for a time her patient. She knew how to put her hand on him at once.

They spent five months in the little house, while the London that knew them in St. James's Square looked on, and made the comments — half amused, half inquisitive — that the act seemed to invite. There was of course no surprise. Nothing surprises the London of to-day. Or if there were any, it was all Marcella's. In spite of her passionate sympathy with the multitude who live in disagreeable homes on about a pound a week, she herself was very sensitive to the neighbourhood of beautiful things, to the charm of old homes, cool woods, green lawns, and the rise and fall of Brookshire hills. Against her wish, she had thought of sacrifice in thinking of the Mile End Road in August.

But there was no sacrifice. Frankly, these five months were among the happiest of her life. She and Maxwell were constantly together, from morning till night, doing the things that were congenial to them, and seeing the things that interested them. They went in and out of every factory and workshop in which certain trades were practised, within a three mile radius; they became the intimate friends

of every factory inspector and every trade-union official in the place. Luckily, Maxwell's shyness — at least in Mile End — was not of the sort that can be readily mistaken for a haughty mind. He was always ready to be informed; his diffident kindness asked to be set at ease; while in any real ardour of debate his trained capacity and his stores of knowledge would put even the expert on his mettle.

As for Marcella, it was her idiosyncrasy that these tailors, furriers, machinists, shirtmakers, by whom she was surrounded in East London, stirred her imagination far more readily than the dwellers in great houses and the wearers of fine raiment had ever stirred it. And Marcella, in the kindled sympathetic state, was always delightful to herself and others. She revelled in the little house and its ugly, druggetted rooms; in the absence of all the usual paraphernalia of their life; in her undisturbed possession of the husband who was at once her lover and the best company she knew or could desire. On the few days when he left her for the day on some errand in which she could not share, to meet him at the train in the evening like any small clerk's wife, to help him carry the books and papers with which he was generally laden along the hot and dingy street, to make him tea from her little spirit kettle, and then to hear the news of the day in the shade of the little smutty back-garden, while the German charwoman who cooked for them had her way with the dinner — there was not an incident in the whole trivial procession that did not amuse and delight her. She renewed her youth; she escaped from the burdensome

"glories of our birth and state"; from that teasing "duty to our equals" on which only the wisest preachers have ever laid sufficient stress; and her one trouble was that the little masquerade must end.

One other drawback indeed, one more blight upon a golden time, there was. Not even Marcella could make up her mind to transplant little Hallin, her only child, from Maxwell Court to East London. It was springtime, and the woods about the Court were breaking into sheets of white and blue. Marcella must needs leave the boy to his flowers and his "grandame earth," sadly warned thereto by the cheeks of other little boys in and about the Mile End Road. But every Friday night she and Maxwell said good-bye to the two little workhouse girls, and the German charwoman, and the village boy from Mellor, who supplied them with all the service they wanted in Mile End, took with them the ancient maid who had been Marcella's mother's maid, and fled home to Brookshire. So on Saturday mornings it generally happened that little Hallin went out to inform his particular friend among the garden boys, that "Mummy had tum ome," and that he was not therefore so much his own master as usual. He explained that he had to show mummy "*oaps* of things" — the two new kittens, the "edge-sparrer's nest," and the "ump they'd made in the churchyard over old Tom Collins from the parish ouses," the sore place on the pony's shoulder, the "ole that mummy's orse had kicked in the stable door," and a host of other curiosities. By way of linking the child with the soil and its people, Marcella had taken care to give

him nursemaids from the village. And the village being only some thirty miles from London, talked in the main the language of London, a language which it soon communicated to the tongue of Maxwell's heir. Marcella tried to school her boy in vain. Hallin chattered, laughed, broadened his a's and dropped all his h's into a bottomless limbo none the less.

What days of joy those Saturdays were for mother and child! All the morning and till about four o'clock, he and she would be inseparable, trailing about together over field and wood, she one of the handsomest of women, he one of the plainest of children — a little square-faced chubby fellow, with eyes monstrously black and big, fat cheeks that hung a little over the firm chin, a sallow complexion, and a large humorous mouth.

But in the late afternoon, alas! Hallin was apt to find the world grow tiresome. For against all his advice "mummy" would allow herself to be clad by Annette, the maid, in a frock of state; carriages would drive up from the 5.10 train; and presently in the lengthening evening the great lawns of the Court would be dotted with strolling groups, or the red drawing-room, with its Romneys and Gainsboroughs, would be filled with talk and laughter circling round mummy at the tea-table; so that all that was left to Hallin was that seat on mummy's knee — his big, dark head pressed disconsolately against her breast, his thumb in his mouth for comfort — which no boy of any spirit would ever consent to occupy, so long as there was any chance of goading a slack companion into things better worth while.

Marcella herself was no less rebellious at heart, and would have asked nothing better than to be left free to spend her weekly holiday in roaming an April world with Hallin. But our country being what it is, the plans that are made in Mile End or Shoreditch have to be adopted by Mayfair or Mayfair's equivalent; otherwise they are apt to find an inglorious tomb in the portfolios that bred them. We have still, it seems, a "ruling class"; and in spite of democracy it is still this "ruling class" that matters. Maxwell was perfectly aware of it; and these Sundays to him were the mere complements of the Mile End weekdays. Marcella ruefully admitted that English life was so, and she did her best. But on Monday mornings she was generally left protesting in her inmost soul against half the women whom these peers and politicians, these administrators and journalists, brought with them, or wondering anxiously whether her particular share in the social effort just over might not have done Aldous more harm than good. She understood vaguely, without vanity, that she was a power in this English society, that she had many warm friends, especially among men of the finer and abler sort. But when a woman loved her, and insisted, as it were, on making her know it — and, after all, the experience was not a rare one — Marcella received the overture with a kind of grateful surprise. She was accustomed, without knowing why, to feel herself ill at ease with certain types of women; even in her own house she was often aware of being furtively watched by hostile eyes; or she found herself suddenly the goal of some sharp little pleasantry that pricked like a stiletto. She supposed that she

was often forgetful and indiscreet. Perhaps the large court she held so easily on these occasions beneath the trees or in the great drawing-rooms of the old house had more to do with the matter. If so, she never guessed the riddle. In society she was conscious of one aim, and one aim only. Its very simplicity made other women incredulous, while it kept herself in the dark.

However, by dint of great pains, she had not yet done Aldous any harm that counted. During all the time of their East End sojourn, a Liberal government, embarrassed by large schemes it had not force enough to carry, was sinking towards inevitable collapse. When the crash came, a weak Conservative government, in which Aldous Maxwell occupied a prominent post, accepted office for a time without a dissolution. They came in on a cry of "industrial reform," and, by way of testing their own party and the country, adopted the Factory Bill for East London, which had now, by the common consent of all the workers upon it, passed into Maxwell's hands. The Bill rent the party in twain; but the Ministry had the courage to go to the country with a programme in which the Maxwell Bill held a prominent place. Trade-unionism rallied to their support; the forces both of reaction and of progress fought for them, in strangely mingled ways; and they were returned with a sufficient, though not large, majority. Lord Ardagh, the veteran leader of the party, became Premier. Maxwell was made President of the Council, while his old friend and associate, Henry Dowson, became Home Secretary, and thereby responsible for

the conduct of the long-expected Bill through the Commons.

When Maxwell came back to her on the afternoon of his decisive interview with Lord Ardagh, she was waiting for him in that same inner room where Tressady paid his first visit. At the sound of her husband's step outside, she sprang up, and they met half-way, her hands clasped in his, against his breast, her face looking up at him.

"Dear wife! at last we have our chance — our real chance," he said to her.

She clung to him, and there was a moment of high emotion, in which thoughts of the past and of the dead mingled with the natural ambition of two people in the prime of life and power. Then Maxwell laughed and drew a long breath.

"The eggs have been all put into my basket in the most generous manner. We stand or fall by the Bill. But it will be a hard fight."

And, in his acute, deliberate way, he began to sum up the forces against him — to speculate on the action of this group and that — Fontenoy's group first and foremost.

Marcella listened, her beautiful hand pensive against her cheek, her eyes on his. Half trembling, she realised what failure, if after all failure should come, would mean to him. Something infinitely tender and maternal spoke in her, pledging her to the utmost help that love and a woman could give.

Such for Maxwell and his wife had been the antecedents of a memorable session.

And now the session was here — was in full stream, indeed, rushing towards the main battle still to come. On the second night of Fontenoy's debate, George Tressady duly caught the Speaker's eye, and made a very fair maiden speech, which earned him a good deal more praise, both from his party and the press, than he — in a disgusted mood — thought at all reasonable. He had misplaced half his notes, and, in his own opinion, made a mess of his main argument. He remarked to Fontenoy afterwards that he had better hang himself, and stalked home after the division pleased with one thing only — that he had not allowed Letty to come.

In reality he had done nothing to mar the reputation that was beginning to attach to him. Fontenoy was content; and the scantiness of the majority by which the Resolution was defeated served at once to make the prospects of the Maxwell Bill, which was to be brought in after Easter, more doubtful, and to sharpen the temper of its foes.

CHAPTER VIII

"Goodness! — what an ugly place it is! It wants five thousand spent on it at once to make it tolerable!"

The remark was Letty Tressady's. She was standing disconsolate on the lawn at Ferth, scanning the old-fashioned house to which George had brought her just five days before. They had been married a fortnight, and were still to spend another week in the country before going back to London and to Parliament. But already Letty had made up her mind that Ferth *must* be rebuilt and refurnished, or she could never endure it.

She threw herself down on a garden seat with a sigh, still studying the house. It was a straight barrack-like building, very high for its breadth, erected early in the last century by an architect who, finding that he was to be allowed but a very scanty sum for his performance, determined with considerable strength of mind to spend all that he had for decoration upon the inside rather than the outside of his mansion. Accordingly the inside had charm — though even so much Letty could not now be got to confess; panellings, mantelpieces, and doorways showed the work of a man of taste. But outside all that had been aimed at was the provision of a central block of building

carried up to a considerable height so as to give the rooms demanded, while it economised in foundations and general space; an outer wall pierced with the plainest openings possible at regular intervals; a high-pitched roof to keep out the rain, whereof the original warm tiles had been long since replaced by the chilliest Welsh slates; and two low and disfiguring wings which held the servants and the kitchens. The stucco with which the house had been originally covered had blackened under the influence of time, weather, and the smoke from the Tressady coalpits. Altogether, what with its pitchy colour, its mean windows, its factory-like plainness and height, Ferth Place had no doubt a cheerless and repellent air, which was increased by its immediate surroundings. For it stood on the very summit of a high hill, whereon the trees were few and windbeaten; while the carriage drives and the paths that climbed the hill were all of them a coaly black. The flower garden behind the house was small and neglected; neither shrubberies nor kitchen garden, nor the small park, had any character or stateliness; everything bore the stamp of bygone possessors who had been rich neither in money nor in fancy; who had been quite content to live small lives in a small way.

Ferth's new mistress thought bitterly of them, as she sat looking at their handiwork. What could be done with such a place? How could she have London people to stay there? Why, their very maids would strike! And, pray, what was a country house worth, without the usual country-house amenities and accessories?

Yet she already began to feel fretted and hampered about money. The inside of the house had been to some extent renovated. She had helped George to choose papers and curtains for the rooms that were to be her special domain, while they were in London together before Easter. But she knew that George had at one time meant to do much more than had actually been done; and he had been in a mood of lover-like apology on the first day of their arrival. "Darling, I had hoped to buy you a hundred pretty things! — but times is bad — dreadful bad!" he had said to her with a laugh. "We will do it by degrees — you won't mind?"

Then she had tried to make him tell her why it was that he had abandoned some of the schemes of improvement that had certainly been in his mind during the first weeks of their engagement. But he had not been very communicative, and had put the blame mostly, as she understood him, on the "beastly pits" and the very low dividends they had been earning during the past six months.

Letty, however, did not in the least believe that the comparatively pinched state of their finances, which, bride as she was, she was already brooding over, was wholly or even mainly due to the pits. She set her little white teeth in sudden anger as she said to herself that it was *not* the pits — it was Lady Tressady! George was crippled now because of the large sums his mother had not been ashamed to wring from him during the last six months. Letty — George's wife — was to go without comforts and conveniences, without the means of seeing her friends and taking

her proper position in the world, because George's mother — a ridiculous, painted old woman, who went in for flirtations and French gowns, when she ought to be subsiding quietly into caps and Bath chairs — would sponge upon his very moderate income, and take what did not belong to her.

"I am *certain* there is something in the background!" said Letty to herself, as she sat looking at the ugly house — "something that she is ashamed of, and that she doesn't tell George. She *couldn't* spend all that money on dress! I believe she is a wicked old woman — she has the most extraordinary creatures at her parties."

The girl's delicate face stiffened vindictively as she fell brooding for the hundredth time over Lady Tressady's enormities.

Then suddenly the garden door opened, and Letty, looking up, saw that George was on the threshold, waving his hand to her. He had left her that morning — almost for the first time since their marriage — to go and see his principal agent and discuss the position of affairs.

As he approached her, she noticed instantly that he was looking tired and ruffled. But the sight of her smoothed his brow. He threw himself down on the grass at her feet, and pressed his lips to the delicately tended hand that lay upon her lap.

"Have you missed me, madame?" he said, peremptorily.

Preoccupied as she was, Letty must needs flush and smile, so well she knew from his eager eye that she pleased him, that he noticed the pretty gown she had

put on for luncheon, and that all the petting his absence had withdrawn from her for an hour or two had come back to her. Other women — more or less of her type — had found his ways beguiling before now. He took courtship as an art, and had his own rooted ideas as to how women should be treated. Neither too gingerly nor too sentimentally — but, above all, with variety!

He repeated his question insistently; whereupon Letty said, with her pert brightness, thinking all the time of the house, "I'm *not* going to make you vain. Besides, I have been frightfully busy."

"You're not going to make me vain? But I choose to be vain. I'll go away for the whole afternoon if I'm not made vain this instant. Ah! that's better. Do you know that you have the softest little curl on your soft little neck, and that your hair has caught the sun on it this morning?"

Letty instinctively put up a hand to tuck away the curl. But he seized the hand. "Little vandal! — What have you been busy with?"

"Oh! I have been over the house with Mrs. Matthews," said Letty, in another tone. "George, it's *dreadful* — the number of things that want doing. Do you know, *positively*, we could not put up more than two couples, if we tried ever so. And as for the state of the attics! Now do listen, George!"

And, holding his hand tight in her eagerness, she went through a vehement catalogue of all that was wanted — new furniture, new decoration, new grates, a new hot-water system, the raising of the wings, and

so on to the alteration of the stables and the replanning of the garden. She had no sooner begun upon her list than George's look of worry returned. He got up from the grass, and sat on the bench beside her.

"Well, I'm sorry you dislike the place so much," he said, when her breath failed her, staring rather gloomily at his despised mansion. "Of course, it's quite true — it is an ugly hole. But the worst of it is, darling, I don't quite see how we're to do all this you talk about. I don't bring any good news from the pits, alas!"

He turned quickly towards her. The thought flashed through his mind — could he be justly charged with having married her on false pretences as to his affairs? No! There had been no misrepresentation of his income or his risks. Everything had been plainly and honestly stated to her father, and therefore to her. For Letty knew all that she wanted to know, and had managed her family since she was a baby.

Letty flushed at his last words.

"Do you mean to say," she said with emphasis, "that those men are really going to strike?"

"I am afraid so. We *must* enforce a reduction, to avoid working at sheer loss, and the men vow they'll come out."

"They want you to make them a present of the mines, I suppose!" said Letty, bitterly. "Why, the tales I hear of their extravagance and laziness! Mrs. Matthews says they'll have none but the best cuts of meat, that they all of them have an harmonium or a

piano in the house, that their houses are *stuffed* with furniture — and the amount of money they spend in betting on their dogs and their football matches is perfectly sickening. And now, I suppose they'll ruin themselves and us, rather than allow you to make a decent profit!"

"That's about it," said George, flinging himself back on the bench. "That's about it."

There was a pause of silence. The eyes of both were turned to the colliery village far below, at the foot of the hill. From this high stretch of garden one looked across the valley and its straggling line of houses, to the pits on the further hillside, the straight black line of the "bank," the pulley wheels, and tall chimneys against the sky. To the left, along the ascending valley, similar chimneys and "banks" were scattered at long intervals, while to the right the valley dipped in sharp wooded undulations to a blue plain bounded by far Welsh hills. The immediate neighbourhood of Ferth, for a coal country, had a woodland charm and wildness which often surprised a stranger. There were untouched copses, and little rivers and fern-covered hills, which still held their own against the ever-encroaching mounds of "spoil" thrown out by the mines. Only the villages were invariably ugly. They were the modern creations of the coal, and had therefore no history and no originality. Their monotonous rows of red cottages were like fragments from some dingy town suburb, and the brick meeting-houses in which they abounded did nothing to abate the general unloveliness.

This view from the Ferth hill was one which had great familiarity for Tressady, and yet no charm. As a boy he had had no love for his home and very few acquaintances in the village. His mother hated the place and the people. She had married very young — for the sake of money and position — to his dull old father, who nevertheless managed to keep his flighty wife in order by dint of a dumb, continuous stubbornness and tyranny, which would have overborne a stronger nature than Lady Tressady's. She was always struggling to get away from Ferth; he to keep her tied there. He was never at ease away from his estate and his pits; she felt herself ten years younger as soon as she had lost sight of the grim black house on its hilltop.

And this one opinion of hers she was able to impress upon her son — George, too, was always glad to turn his back on Ferth and its people. The colliers seemed to him a brutal crew, given over to coarse sports, coarse pleasures, and an odious religion. As to their supposed grievances and hardships, his intimate conviction as a boy had always been that the miner got the utmost both out of his employers and out of society that he was worth.

"Upon my word, I often think," he said at last, his inward reverie finding speech, "I often think it was a great pity my grandfather discovered the coal at all! In the long run I believe we should have done better without it. We should not at any rate have been bound up with these hordes, with whom you can no more reason than with so many blocks of their own coal!"

Letty made no answer. She had turned back towards the house. Suddenly she said, with an energy that startled him,

"George, what *are* we to do with that place? It gives me a nightmare. The extraordinary thing is the way that everything in it has gone to ruin. Did your mother really live here while you were away?"

George's expression darkened.

"I always used to suppose she was here," he said. "That was our bargain. But I begin to believe now that she was mostly in London. One can't wonder at it — she always hated the place."

"Of course she was in London!" thought Letty to herself, "spending piles of money, running shamefully into debt, and letting the house go to pieces. Why, the linen hasn't been darned for years!"

Aloud she said:

"Mrs. Matthews says a charwoman and a little girl from the village used to be left alone in the house for months, to play any sort of games, with nobody to look after them — *nobody* — while you were away!"

George looked at his wife — and then would only slip his arm round her for answer.

"Darling! you don't know how I've been worried all the morning — don't let's make worry at home. After all it *is* rather nice to be here together, isn't it? — and we shall do — we sha'n't starve! Perhaps we shall pull through with the pits after all — it is difficult to believe the men will make such fools of themselves — and — well! you know my angel mother can't always be swooping upon us as she has done

lately. Let's just be patient a little — very likely I can sell a few bits of land before long that will give us some money in hand — and then this small person shall bedizen herself and the house as much as she pleases. And meanwhile, *madame ma femme*, let me point out to you that your George never professed to be anything but a very bad match for you!"

Letty remembered all his facts and figures perfectly. Only somehow she had regarded them with the optimism natural to a girl who is determined to be married. She had promptly forgotten the adverse chances he had insisted upon, and she had converted all his averages into minima. No, she could not say she had not been warned; but nevertheless the result promised to be quite different from what she had expected.

However, with her husband's arm round her, it was not easy to maintain her ill-humour, and she yielded. They wandered on into the wood which fringed the hill on its further side, she coquetting, he courting and flattering her in a hundred ways. Her soft new dress, her dainty lightness and freshness, made harmony in his senses with the April day, the building rooks, the breaths of sudden perfume from field and wood, the delicate green that was creeping over the copses, softening all the edges of the black scars left by the pits. The bridal illusion returned. George eagerly — hungrily — gave himself up to it. And Letty, though conscious all the while of a restless feeling at the back of her mind that they were losing time, must needs submit.

However, when the luncheon gong had sounded and

they were strolling back to the house, he bethought himself, knit his brows again, and said to her:

"Do you know, darling, Dalling told me this morning" — Dalling was the Tressadys' principal agent — "that he thought it would be a good thing if we could make friends with some of the people here? The Union are not — or *were* not — quite so strong in this valley as they are in some other parts. That's why that fellow Burrows — confound him! — has come to live here of late. It might be possible to make some of the more intelligent fellows hear reason. My uncles have always managed the thing with a very high hand — very natural! — the men *are* a set of rough, ungrateful brutes, who talk impossible stuff, and never remember anything that's done for them — but after all, if one has to make a living out of them, one may as well learn how to drive them, and what they want to be at. Suppose you come and show yourself in the village this afternoon?"

Letty looked extremely doubtful.

"I really don't get on very well with poor people, George. It's very dreadful, I know, but there! — I'm not Lady Maxwell — and I can't help it. Of course, with the poor people at home in our own cottages it's different — they always curtsy and are very respectful — but Mrs. Matthews says the people here are so independent, and think nothing of being rude to you if they don't like you."

George laughed.

"Go and call upon them in that dress and see! I'll eat my hat if anybody's rude. Beside, I shall be there to protect you. We won't go, of course, to any

of the strong Union people. But there are two or three — an old nurse of mine I really used to be rather fond of — and a fireman that's a good sort — and one or two others. I believe it would amuse you."

Letty was quite certain that it would not amuse her at all. However, she assented unwillingly, and they went in to lunch.

So in the afternoon the husband and wife sallied forth. Letty felt that she was being taken through an ordeal, and that George was rather foolish to wish it. However, she did her best to be cheerful, and to please George she still wore the pretty Paris frock of the morning, though it seemed to her absurd to be trailing it through a village street with only colliers and their wives to look at it.

"What ill luck," said George, suddenly, as they descended their own hill, "that that fellow Burrows should have settled down here, in one's very pocket, like this!"

"Yes, you had enough of him at Malford, didn't you?" said Letty. "I don't yet understand how he comes to be here."

George explained that about the preceding Christmas there had been, temporarily, strong signs of decline in the Union strength of the Ferth district. A great many miners had quietly seceded; one of the periodical waves of suspicion as to funds and management to which all trade unions are liable had swept over the neighbourhood; and wholesale desertion from the Union standard seemed likely. In hot haste the

Central Committee sent down Burrows as organising agent. The good fight he had made against Tressady at the Market Malford election had given him prestige; and he had both presence and speaking power. He had been four months at Ferth, speaking all over the district, and now, instead of leaving the Union, the men had been crowding into it, and were just as hot — so it was said — for a trial of strength with the masters as their comrades in other parts of the county.

"And before Burrows has done with us, I should say he'll have cost the masters in this district hundreds of thousands. I call him dear at the money!" said George, finally, with a dismal cheerfulness.

He was really full of Burrows, and of the general news of the district which his agent had been that morning pouring into his ear. But he had done his best not to talk about either at luncheon. Letty had a curious way of making the bearer of unpleasant tidings feel that it was somehow all his own fault that things should be so; and George, even in this dawn of marriage, was beginning, half consciously, to recognise two or three such peculiarities of hers.

"What I cannot understand," said Letty, vigorously, "is why such people as Mr. Burrows are *allowed* to go about making the mischief he does."

George laughed, but nevertheless repressed a sudden feeling of irritation. The inept remark of a pretty woman generally only amused him. But this Burrows matter was beginning to touch him home.

"You see we happen to be a free country," he said drily, "and Burrows and his like happen to be running us just now. Maxwell & Co. are in the shafts —

Burrows sits up aloft and whips on the team. The extraordinary thing is that nothing personal makes any difference. The people here know perfectly well that Burrows drinks — that the woman he lives with is not his wife —"

"George!" cried Letty, "how *can* you say such dreadful things!"

"Sorry, my darling! but the world is not a nice place. He picked her up somehow — they say she was a commercial traveller's wife — left on his hands at a country inn. Anyway she's not divorced, and the husband's alive. She looks like a walking skeleton, and is probably going to die. Nevertheless they say Burrows adores her. And as for my resentments — don't be shocked — I'm inclined to like Burrows all the better for *that* little affair. But then I'm not pious, like the people here. However, they don't mind — and they don't mind the drink — and they believe he spends their money on magnificent dinners at hotels — and they don't mind that. They don't mind anything — they shout themselves hoarse whenever Burrows speaks — they're as proud as Punch if he shakes hands with them — and then they tell the most gruesome tales of him behind his back, and like him all the better, apparently, for being a scoundrel. Queer but true. Well, here we are — now, darling, you may expect to be stared at!"

For they had entered on the village street, and Ferth Magna, by some quick freemasonry, had become suddenly conscious of the bride and bridegroom. Here and there a begrimed man in his shirt-sleeves would open his front door cautiously and look at

them; the children and womenkind stood boldly on the doorsteps and stared; while the people in the little shops ran back into the street, parcels and baskets in hand. The men working the morning shift had just come back from the pits, and their wives were preparing to wash their blackened lords, before the whole family sat down to tea. But both tea and ablutions were forgotten, so long as the owner of Ferth Place and the new Lady Tressady were in sight. The village eyes took note of everything; of the young man's immaculate serge suit and tan waistcoat, his thin, bronzed face and fair moustache; of the bride's grey gown, the knot of airy pink at her throat, the coils of bright brown hair on which her hat was set, and the buckles on her pretty shoes. Then the village retreated within doors again; and each house buzzed and gossiped its fill. There had been a certain amount of not very cordial response to George's salutations; but to Letty's thinking the women had eyed her with an unpleasant and rather hostile boldness.

"Mary Batchelor's house is down here," said George, turning into a side lane, not without a feeling of relief. "I hope we sha'n't find her out — no, there she is. You can't call these people affectionate, can you?"

They were close on a group of three brick cottages all close together. Their doors were all open. In one cottage a stout collier's wife was toiling through her wash. At the door of another the sewing-machine agent was waiting for his weekly payment; while on the threshold of the third stood an elderly tottering

woman shading her eyes from the light as she tried to make out the features of the approaching couple.

"Why, Mary!" said George, "you haven't forgotten me? I have brought my wife to see you."

And he held out his hand with a boyish kindness.

The old woman looked at them both in a bewildered way. Her face, with its long chin and powerful nose, was blanched and drawn, her grey hair straggling from under her worn black-ribboned cap; and her black dress had a neglected air, which drew George's attention. Mary Batchelor, so long as he remembered her, whether as his old nurse, or in later days as the Bible-woman of the village, had always been remarkable for a peculiar dignity and neatness.

"Mary, is there anything wrong?" he asked her, holding her hand.

"Coom yer ways in," said the old woman, grasping his arm, and taking no notice of Letty. "He's gone — he'll not freeten nobody — he wor here three days afore they buried him. I could no let him go — but it's three weeks now sen they put him away."

"Why, Mary, what is it? Not *James!* — not your son!" said George, letting her guide him into the cottage.

"Aye, it's James — it's my son," she repeated drearily. "Will yer be takkin a cheer — an perhaps" — she looked round uncertainly, first at Letty, then at the wet floor where she had been feebly scrubbing — "perhaps the leddy ull be sittin down. I'm nobbut in a muddle. But I don't seem to get forard wi my work a mornins — not sen they put im away."

And she dropped into a chair herself, with a long

sigh — forgetting her visitors apparently — her large and bony hands, scarred with their life's work, lying along her knees.

George stood beside her silent a moment.

"I hardly like to say I hadn't heard," he said at last, gently. "You'll think I *ought* to have heard. But I didn't know. I have been in town and very busy."

"Aye," said Mary, without looking up, "aye, an yer've been gettin married. I knew as yer didn't mean nothin onkind."

Then she stopped again — till suddenly, with a furtive gesture, she raised her apron, and drew it across her eyes, which had the look of perennial tears.

On the other side of the cottage meanwhile a boy of about fourteen was sitting. He had just done his afternoon's wash, and was resting himself by the fire, enjoying a thumbed football almanac. He had not risen when the visitors entered, and while his grandmother was speaking his lips still moved dumbly, as he went on adding up the football scores. He was a sickly, rather repulsive lad with a callous expression.

"Let me wait outside, George," said Letty, hurriedly.

Some instinct in her shrank from the poor mother and her story. But George begged her to stay, and she sat down nervously by the door, trying to protect her pretty skirt from the wet boards.

"Will you tell me how it was?" said George, sitting down himself in front of the bowed mother, and bending towards her. "Was it in the pit? Jamie wasn't one of our men, I know. Wasn't it for Mr. Morrison he worked?"

Mrs. Batchelor made a sign of assent. Then she raised her head quickly, and a flash of some passionate convulsion passed through her face.

"It wor John Burgess as done it," she said, staring at George. "It wor him as took the boy's life. But he's gone himsel — so theer — I'll not say no more. It wor Jamie's first week o hewin — he'd been a loader this three year, an taken a turn at the hewin now an again — an five weeks sen John Burgess — he wor butty for Mr. Morrison, yer know, in the Owd Pit — took him on, an the lad wor arnin six an sixpence a day. An he wor that pleased yo cud see it shinin out ov im. And it wor on the Tuesday as he went on the afternoon shift. I saw im go, an he wor down'earted. An I fell a cryin as he went up the street, for I knew why he wor down'earted, an I asked the Lord to elp him. And about six o'clock they come runnin — an they towd me there'd bin an accident, an they wor bringin im — an he wor alive — an I must bear up. They'd found him kneelin in his place with his arm up, an the pick in it — just as the blast had took him — An his poor back — oh! my God — scorched off him — *scorched off him.*"

A shudder ran through her. But she recovered herself and went on, still gazing intently at Tressady, her gaunt hand raised as though for attention.

"An they bräat him in, an they laid him on that settle" — she pointed to the bench by the fire — "an the doctors didn't interfere — there wor nowt to do — they left me alone wi un. But he come to, a minute after they laid im down — an I ses, 'Jamie, ow did it appen' an he ses, 'Mother, it wor John Burgess — ee

opened my lamp for to light hissen as had gone out — an I don't know no more.' An then after a bit he ses, 'Mother, don't you fret — I'm glad I'm goin — I'd got the drink in me,' he ses. An then he give two three little breaths, as though he wor pantin — an I kiss him."

She stopped, her face working, her trembling hands pressed hard against each other on her knee. Letty felt the tears leap to her eyes in a rush that startled herself.

"An he would a bin twenty-one year old, come next August — an allus a lad as yer couldn't help gettin fond on — not sen he were a little un. An when he wor layin there, I ses to myself, 'He's the third as the coal-gettin ha took from me.' An I minded my feyther an uncle — how they was braat home both togither, when I wor nobbut thirteen years old — not a scar on em, nobbut a little blood on my feyther's forehead — but stone dead, both on em — from the afterdamp. Theer was thirty-six men killed in that explosion — an I recolleck how old Mr. Morrison — Mr. Walter's father — sent the coffins round — an how the men went on because they warn't good ones. Not a man would go down the pit till they was changed — if a man got the life choked out of im, they thowt the least the masters could do was to give un a dacent coffin to lie in. But theer — nobody helped me wi Jamie — I buried him mysel — an it wor all o the best."

She dried her eyes again, sighing plaintively. George said what kind and consoling things he could think of. Mary Batchelor put up her hand and touched him on the arm as he leant over her.

"Aye, I knew yo'd be sorry — an yor wife —"

She turned feebly towards Letty, trying with her blurred and tear-dimmed sight to make out what Sir George's bride might be like. She looked for a moment at the small, elegant person in the corner, — at the sheaf of nodding rosebuds on the hat — the bracelets — the pink cheeks under the dainty veil, — looked with a curious aloofness, as though from a great distance. Then, evidently, another thought struck her like a lash. She ceased to see or think of Letty. Her grip tightened on George's arm.

"An I'm allus thinkin," she said, with a passionate sob, "of that what he said about the drink. He'd allus bin a sober lad, till this lasst winter it did seem as though he cudna keep hiself from it — it kep creepin on im — an several times lately he'd broke out very bad, pay-days — an he knew I'd been frettin. And who was ter blame — I ast yo, or onybody — who was it ter blame?"

Her voice rose to a kind of cry.

"His feyther died ov it, and his grandfeyther afore that. His grandfeyther wor found dead i the roadside, after they'd made him blind-drunk at owd Morse's public-house, where the butty wor reckonin with im an his mates. But he'd never ha gone near the drink if they'd hadn't druv him to't, for he wasn't inclined that way. But the butty as gave him work kep the public, an if yer didn't drink, yer didn't get no work. You must drink yoursel sick o Saturdays, or theer'd be no work for you o Mondays. 'Noa, yer can sit at ome,' they'd say to un, 'ef yer so damned pertickler.' I ast yor pardon, sir, for the bad word,

but that's ow they'd say it. I've often heerd owd John say as he'd a been glad to ha given the butty back a shillin ov is pay to be let off the drink. An Willum, that's my usband, he wor allus at it too — an the doctor towd me one day, as Willum lay a-dyin, as it ran in the blood — an Jamie heard im — I know he did — for I foun im on the stairs — listenin."

She paused again, lost in a mist of incoherent memories, the tears falling slowly.

After a minute's silence, George said — not indeed knowing what to say — "We're *very* sorry for you, Mary — my wife and I — we wish we could do anything to help you. I am afraid it can't make any difference to you — I expect it makes it all the worse — to think that accidents are so much fewer — that so much has been done. And yet times are mended, aren't they?"

Mary made no answer.

George sat looking at her, conscious, as he seldom was, of raw youth and unreadiness — conscious, too, of Letty's presence in a strange, hindering way — as of something that both blunted emotion and made one rather ashamed to show it.

He could only pursue the lame topic of improvement, of changed times. The disappearance of old abuses, of "butties" and "tommy-shops"; the greater care for life; the accident laws; the inspectors. He found himself growing eloquent at last, yet all the time regarding himself, as it were, from a distance — ironically.

Mary Batchelor listened to him for a while, her head bent with something of the submission of the

old servant, till something he said roused again the quick shudder, the look of anguished protest.

"Aye, I dessay it's aw reet, Mr. George — I dessay it is — what yer say. The inspectors is very cliver — an the wages is paid proper. But theer — say what yer will! I've a son on the railway out Lichfield way — an he's allus taakin about is long hours — they're killing im, he says — an I allus ses to im, 'Yer may jest thank the Lord, Harry, as yer not in the pits.' He never gets no pity out o me. An soomtimes I wakes in the morning, an I thinks o the men, cropin away in the dark — down theer — under me and my bed — for they do say the pits now runs right under Ferth village — an I think to mysel — how long will it be before yo poor fellers is laying like my Jim? Yer may be reet about the accidents, Mr. George — but I *know*, ef yer wor to go fro house to house i this village — it would be like tis in the Bible — I've often thowt o them words — '*Theer was not a house* — no, nary one! — *where there was not one dead.*'"

She hung her head again, muttering to herself. George made out with difficulty that she was going through one phantom scene after another — of burning, wounds, and sudden death. One or two of the phrases — of the fragmentary details that dropped out without name or place — made his flesh creep. He was afraid lest Letty should hear them, and was just putting out his hand for his hat, when Mrs. Batchelor gripped his arm again. Her face — so white and large-featured — had the gleam of something like a miserable smile upon it.

"Aye, an the men theirsels ud say jest as you do.

'Lor, Mrs. Batchelor,' they'd say, 'why, the pits is as safe as a church'—an they'd *laff*—Jamie ud laff at me times. But it's the *women*, Mr. George, as knows—it's the women that ave to wash the bodies."

A great trembling ran through her again. George instinctively rose, and motioned to Letty to go. She too rose, but she did not go. She stood by the door, her wide grey eyes fixed with a kind of fascination on the speaker; while behind her a ring of children could be seen in the street, staring at the pretty lady.

Mary Batchelor saw nothing but Tressady, whom she was still holding by the arm—looking up to him.

"Aye, but I didna disturb my Jamie, yer know. Noa!—I left im i the owd coat they'd thrown over im i the pit—I dursn't ha touched is back. Noa, I *dursn't*. But I made his shroud mysen, an I put it ower his poor workin clothes, an I washed his face, an is hands an feet—an then I kissed him, an I said, 'Jamie, yo mun go an tell the Lord as yo ha done your best, an He ha dealt hardly by you!—an that's the treuth—He ha dealt hardly by yer!'"

She gave a loud sob, and bowed her head on her hands a moment. Then, pushing back her grey locks from her face, she rose, struggling for composure.

"Aye, aye, Mr. George—aye, aye, I'll not keep yer no longer."

But as she took his hand, she added passionately:

"An I towd the vicar I couldn't be Bible-woman no more. Theer's somethin broken in me sen Jamie died. I must keep things to mysen—I ain't got nuthin good to say to others—I'm allus *grievin* at the Lord. Good-bye to yer—good-bye to yer."

Her voice had grown absent, indifferent. But when George asked her, just as they were leaving the cottage, who was the boy sitting by the fire, her face darkened. She came hurriedly to the door with them, and said in George's ear:

"He's my darter's child — my darter by my first usband. His feyther an mother are gone, an he come up from West Bromwich to live wi me. But he isn't no comfort to me. He don't take no notice of anybody. He set like that, with his football, when Jamie lay a-dyin. I'd as lief be shut on him. But theer — I've got to put up wi im."

Letty meanwhile had approached the boy and looked at him curiously.

"Do you work in the pits too?" she asked him.

The boy stared at her.

"Yes," he said.

"Do you like it?"

He gave a rough laugh.

"I reckon yo've got to like it," he said. And turning his back on his questioner, he went back to his almanac.

"Don't let us do any more visiting," said George, impatiently, as they emerged into the main street. "I'm out of love with the village. We'll do our blandishments another day. Let's go a little further up the valley and get away from the houses."

Letty assented, and they walked along the village, she looking curiously into the open doors of the houses, by way of return for the inquisitive attention once more lavished upon herself and George.

"The houses are *quite* comfortable," she said presently. "And I looked into Mrs. Batchelor's back room while you were talking. It was just as Mrs. Matthews said — such good carpets and curtains, two chests of drawers, and an harmonium — and pictures — and flowers in the windows. George! what are 'butties'?"

"'Butties' are sub-contractors," he said absently — "men who contract with the pit-owners to get the coal, either on a large or a small scale — now mostly on a small scale. They engage and pay the colliers in some pits, in others the owners deal direct."

"And what is a 'tommy-shop'?"

"'Tommy' is the local word for 'truck' — paying in kind instead of in money. You see, the butties and the owners between them used to own the public-houses and the provision-shops, and the amount of coin of the realm the men got in wages in the bad old times was infinitesimal. They were expected to drink the butty's beer, and consume the butty's provisions — at the butty's prices, of course — and the butty kept the accounts. Oh! it was an abomination! but of course it was done away with long ago."

"Of course it was!" said Letty, indignantly. "They never remember what's done for them. Did you see what *excellent* teas there were laid out in some of the houses — and those girls with their hats smothered in feathers? Why, I should never dream of wearing so many!"

She was once more her quick, shrewd self. All trace of the tears that had surprised her while Mary Batchelor was describing her son's death had passed

away. Her half-malicious eyes glanced to right and left, peering into the secrets of the village.

"And these are the people that talk of starving!" she said to George, scornfully, as they emerged into the open road. "Why, anyone can see—"

George, suddenly returned from a reverie, understood what she was saying, and remarked, with an odd look:

"You think their houses aren't so bad? One is always a little surprised—don't you think?—when the poor are comfortable? One takes it as something to one's own credit—I detect it in myself scores of times. Well!—one seems to say—they *could* have done without it—one might have kept it for oneself—what a fine generous fellow I am!"

He laughed.

"I didn't mean that at all," said Letty, protesting.

"Didn't you? Well, after all, darling—you see, you don't have to live in those houses, nice as they are—and you don't have to do your own scrubbing. Perth may be a vile hole, but I suppose you could put a score of these houses inside it—and I'm a pauper, but I can provide you with two housemaids. I say, why do you walk so far away from me?"

And in spite of her resistance, he took her hand, put it through his arm, and held it there.

"Look at me, darling," he said imperiously. "How *can* anyone spy upon us with these trees and high walls? I want to see how pretty and fresh you look—I want to forget that poor thing and her tale. Do you know that somewhere—far down in me—there's a sort of black pool—and when anything stirs it up

— for the moment I want to hang myself — the world seems such an awful place! It got stirred up just now — not while she was talking — but just as I looked back at that miserable old soul, standing at her door. She used to be such a jolly old thing — always happy in her Bible — and in Jamie, I suppose — quite sure that she was going to a nice heaven, and would only have to wait a little bit, till Jamie got there too. She seemed to know all about the Almighty's plans for herself and everybody else. Her drunken husband was dead: my father left her a bit of money, so did an old uncle, I believe. She'd gossip and pray and preach with anybody. And now she'll weep and pine like that till she dies — and she isn't sure even about heaven any more — and instead of Jamie, she's got that oafish lad, that changeling, hung round her neck — to kick her and ill-treat her in another year or two. Well! and do you ever think that something like that has got to happen to all of us — something hideous — some torture — something that'll make us wish we'd never been born? Darling, am I a mad sort of a fool? Stop here — in the shade — give me a kiss!"

And he made her pause at a shady corner in the road, between two oak copses on either hand — a river babbling at the foot of one of them. He put his arm round her, and stooping kissed her red lips with a kind of covetous passion. Then, still holding her, he looked out from the trees to the upper valley with its scattered villages, its chimneys and engine-houses.

"It struck me — what she said of the men under

our feet. They're at it now, Letty, hewing and sweating. Why are they there, and you and I here? I'm *precious* glad, aren't you? But I'm not going to make believe that there's no difference. Don't let's be hypocrites, whatever we are."

Letty was perplexed and a little troubled. He had only shown her this excitability once before — on that odd uncomfortable night when he made her sit with him on the Embankment. Whenever it came it seemed to upset her dominant impression of him. But yet it excited her too — it appealed to something undeveloped — some yearning, protecting instinct which was new to her.

She suddenly put up her hand and touched his hair.

"You talk so oddly, George. I think sometimes" — she laughed with a pretty gaiety — "you'll go bodily over to Lady Maxwell and her 'set' some day!"

George made a contemptuous sound.

"May the Lord preserve us from quacks," he said lightly. "One had better be a hypocrite. Look, little woman, there is a shower coming. Shall we turn home?"

They walked home, chatting and laughing. At their own front door the butler handed George a telegram. He opened it and read:

"Must come down to consult you on important business — shall arrive at Ferth about 9.30. — Amelia Tressady."

Letty, who was looking over George's shoulder, gave a little cry of dismay.

Then, to avoid the butler's eyes and ears, they turned hurriedly into George's smoking-room which opened off the hall, and shut the door.

"George! she has come to get more money out of you!" cried Letty, anger and annoyance written in every line of her little frowning face.

"Well, darling, she can't get blood out of a stone!" said George, crushing the telegram in his hand and throwing it away. "It is a little too bad of my mother, I think, to spoil our honeymoon time like this. However, it can't be helped. Will you tell them to get her room ready?"

CHAPTER IX

"Now, my dear George! I do think I may claim at least that you should remember I am your *mother!*" — the speaker raised a fan from her knee, and used it with some vehemence. "Of course I can't help seeing that you don't treat me as you ought to do. I don't want to complain of Letty — I daresay she was taken by surprise — but all I can say as to her reception of me last night is, that it wasn't pretty — that's all; it wasn't *pretty*. My room felt like an ice-house — Justine tells me nobody has slept there for months — and no fire until just the moment I arrived; and — and no flowers on the dressing-table — no little *attentions*, in fact. I can only say it was not what I am accustomed to. My feelings overcame me; that poor dear Justine will tell you what a state she found me in. She cried herself, to see me so upset."

Lady Tressady was sitting upright on the straight-backed sofa of George's smoking-room. George, who was walking up and down the room, thought, with discomfort, as he glanced at her from time to time, that she looked curiously old and dishevelled. She had thrown a piece of white lace round her head, in place of the more elaborate preparation for the world's gaze that she was wont to make. Her dress — a study in purples — had been a marvel, but was

now old, and even tattered; the ruffles at her wrist were tumbled; and the pencilling under her still fine eyes had been neglected. George, between his wife's dumb anger and his mother's folly, had passed through disagreeable times already since Lady Tressady's arrival, and was now once more endeavouring to get to the bottom of her affairs.

"You forget, mother," he said, in answer to Lady Tressady's complaint, "that the house is not mounted for visitors, and that you gave us very short notice."

Nevertheless he winced inwardly as he spoke at the thought of Letty's behaviour the night before.

Lady Tressady bridled.

"We will not discuss it, if you please," she said, with an attempt at dignity. "I should have thought that you and Letty might have known I should not have broken in on your honeymoon without most *pressing* reasons. George!"—her voice trembled, she put her lace handkerchief to her eyes—"I am an unfortunate and miserable woman, and if you—my own darling son—don't come to my rescue, I—I don't know what I may be driven to do!"

George took the remark calmly, having probably heard it before. He went on walking up and down.

"It's no good, mother, dealing in generalities, I am afraid. You promised me this morning to come to business. If you will kindly tell me at once what is the matter, and what is the *figure*, I shall be obliged to you."

Lady Tressady hesitated, the lace on her breast fluttering. Then, in desperation, she confessed herself, first reluctantly, then in a torrent.

During the last two years, then, she said, she had been trying her luck for the first time in — well, in speculation!

"Speculation!" said George, looking at her in amazement. "In what?"

Lady Tressady tried again to preserve her dignity. She had been investing, she said — trying to increase her income on the Stock Exchange. She had done it quite as much for George's sake as her own, that she might improve her position a little, and be less of a burden upon him. Everybody did it! Several of her best women-friends were as clever at it as any man, and often doubled their allowances for the year. She, of course, had done it under the *best* advice. George knew that she had friends in the City who would do anything — positively *anything* — for her. But somehow —

Then her tone dropped. Her foot in its French shoe began to fidget on the stool before her.

Somehow, she had got into the hands of a reptile — there! No other word described the creature in the least — a sort of financial agent, who had treated her unspeakably, disgracefully. She had trusted him implicitly, and the result was that she now owed the reptile who, on the strength of her name, her son, and her aristocratic connections, had advanced her money for these adventures, a sum —

"Well, the truth is I am afraid to say what it is," said Lady Tressady, allowing herself for once a cry of nature, and again raising a shaky hand to her eyes.

"How much?" said George, standing over her, cigarette in hand.

"Well — four thousand pounds!" said Lady Tres-

sady, her eyes blinking involuntarily as she looked up at him.

"*Four thousand pounds!*" exclaimed George. "Preposterous!"

And, raising his hand, he flung his cigarette violently into the fire and resumed his walk, hands thrust into his pockets.

Lady Tressady looked tearfully at his long, slim figure as he walked away, conscious, however, even at this agitated moment, of the quick thought that he had inherited some of her elegance.

"George!"

"Yes — wait a moment — mother" — he faced round upon her decidedly. "Let me tell you at once, that at the present moment it is quite impossible for me to find that sum of money."

Lady Tressady flushed passionately like a thwarted child.

"Very well, then," she said — "very well. Then it will be bankruptcy — and I hope you and Letty will like the scandal!"

"So he threatens bankruptcy?"

"Do you think I should have come down here except for something like that?" she cried. "Look at his letters!"

And she took a tumbled roll out of the bag on her arm and gave it to him. George threw himself into a chair, and tried to get some idea of the correspondence; while Lady Tressady kept up a stream of plaintive chatter he could only endeavour not to hear.

As far as he could judge on a first inspection, the

papers concerned a long series of risky transactions, — financial gambling of the most pronounced sort, — whereof the few gains had been long since buried deep in scandalous losses. The outrageous folly of some of the ventures and the magnitude of the sums involved made him curse inwardly. It was the first escapade of the kind he could remember in his mother's history, and, given her character, he could only regard it as adding a new and real danger to his life and Letty's.

Then another consideration struck him.

"How on earth did you come to know so much about the ins and outs of Stock Exchange business," he asked her suddenly, with surprise, in the midst of his reading. "You never confided in me. I never supposed you took an interest in such things."

In truth, he would have supposed her mentally incapable of the kind of gambling finance these papers bore witness of. She had never been known to do a sum or present an account correctly in her life; and he had often, in his own mind, accepted her density in these directions as a certain excuse for her debts. Yet this correspondence showed here and there a degree of financial legerdemain of which any City swindler might have been proud — so far, at least, as he could judge from his hasty survey.

Lady Tressady drew herself up sharply in answer to his remark, though not without a flutter of the eyelids which caught his attention.

"Of course, my dear George, I always knew you thought your mother a fool. As a matter of fact, all my friends tell me that I have a *very* clear head."

George could not restrain himself from laughing aloud.

"In face of this?" he said, holding up the final batch of letters, which contained Mr. Shapetsky's last formidable account; various imperious missives from a "sharp-practice" solicitor, whose name happened to be disreputably known to George Tressady; together with repeated and most explicit assurances on the part both of agent and lawyer, that if arrangements were not made at once by Lady Tressady for meeting at least half Mr. Shapetsky's bill — which had now been running some eighteen months — and securing the other half, legal steps would be taken immediately.

Lady Tressady at first met her son's sarcasm in angry silence, then broke into shrill denunciation of Shapetsky's "villanies." How could decent people, people in society, protect themselves against such creatures!

George walked to the window, and stood looking out into the April garden. Presently he turned, and interrupted his mother.

"I notice, mother, that these transactions have been going on for nearly two years. Do you remember, when I gave you that large sum at Christmas, you said it would 'all but' clear you; and when I gave you another large sum last month, you professed to be entirely cleared? Yet all the time you were receiving these letters, and you owed this fellow almost as much as you do now. Do you think it was worth while to mislead me in that way?"

He stood leaning against the window, his fingers

drumming on the sill. The contrast between the youth of the figure and the absence of youth in face and voice was curious. Perhaps Lady Tressady felt vaguely that he looked like a boy and spoke like a master, for her pride rose.

"You have no right to speak to me like that, George! I did everything for the best. I always do everything for the best. It is my misfortune to be so — so confiding, so hopeful. I must always believe in someone — that's what makes my friends so *extremely* fond of me. You and your poor darling father were never the least like me — " And she went off into a tearful comparison between her own character and the characters of her husband and son — in which of course it was not she that suffered.

George did not heed her. He was once more staring out of window, thinking hard. So far as he could see, the money, or the greater part of it, would have to be found. The man, of course, was a scoundrel, but of the sort that keeps within the law; and Lady Tressady's monstrous folly had given him an easy prey. When he thought of the many sacrifices he had made for his mother, of her ample allowance, her incorrigible vanity and greed — and then of the natural desires of his young wife — his heart burned within him.

"Well, I can only tell you," he said at last, turning round upon her, "that I see no way out. How is that man's claim to be met? I don't know. Even if I *could* meet it — which I see no chance of doing — by crippling myself for some time, how should I be at liberty to do it? My wife and her needs have now the first claim upon me."

"Very well," said Lady Tressady, proudly, raising her handkerchief, however, to hide her trembling lips.

"Let me remind you," he continued, ceremoniously, "that the whole of this place is in bad condition, except the few rooms we have just done up, and that money *must* be spent upon it — it is only fair to Letty that it should be spent. Let me remind you also, that you are a good deal responsible for this state of things."

Lady Tressady moved uneasily. George was now speaking in his usual half-nonchalant tone, and he had provided himself with another cigarette. But his eye held her.

"You will remember that you promised me while I was abroad to live here and look after the house. I arranged money affairs with you, and other affairs, upon that basis. But it appears that during the four years I was away you were here altogether, at different times, about three months. Yet you made me believe you were here; if I remember right, you dated your letters from here. And of course, in four years, an old house that is totally neglected goes to the bad."

"Who has been telling you such falsehoods?" cried Lady Tressady. "I was here a great deal more than that — a great deal more!"

But the scarlet colour, do what she would, was dyeing her still delicate skin, and her eyes alternately obstinate and shuffling, tried to take themselves out of the range of George's.

As for George, as he stood there coolly smoking, he was struck — or, rather, the critical mind in him was struck — by a sudden perception of the meanness of aspect which sordid cares of the kind his mother was

now plunged in can give to the human face. He felt the rise of a familiar disgust. How many scenes of ugly battle over money matters could he not remember in his boyhood between his father and mother! And later — in India — what things he had known women do for money or dress! He thought scornfully of a certain intriguing lady of his acquaintance at Madras — who had borrowed money of him — to whom he had given ball-dresses; and of another, whose selfish extravagance had ruined one of the best of men. Did all women tend to be of this make, however poetic might be their outward seeming?

Aloud, he said quietly, in answer to his mother's protest:

"I think you will find that is about accurate. I mention it merely to show you how it is that I find myself now plunged in so many expenses. And, now, doesn't it strike you as a *little* hard that I should be called upon to strip and cripple myself still further — *not* to give my wife the comforts and conveniences I long to give her, but to pay such debts as those?"

Involuntarily he struck his hand on the papers lying in the chair where he had been sitting.

Lady Tressady, too, rose from her seat.

"George, if you are going to be *violent* towards your mother, I had better go," she said, with an attempt at dignity. "I suppose Letty has been gossiping with her servants about me. Oh! I knew what to expect!" cried Lady Tressady, gathering up fan and handkerchief from the sofa behind her with a hand that shook. "I always said from the beginning that she would set you against me! She has never treated me as — as a

daughter — never! And that is my weakness — I must be cared for — I must be treated with — with tenderness."

"I wouldn't give way, mother, if I were you," said George, quite unmoved by the show of tears. "I think, if you will reflect upon it, that it is Letty and I who have the most cause to give way. If you will allow me, I will go and have a talk with her. I believe she is sitting in the garden."

His mother turned sullenly away from him, and he left the room.

As he passed through the long oak-panelled hall that led to the garden, he was seized with an odd sense of pity for himself. This odious scene behind him, and now this wrestle with Letty that must be gone through — were these the joys of the honeymoon?

Letty was not in the garden. But as he passed into the wood on the farther side of the hill he saw her sitting under a tree halfway down the slope, with some embroidery in her hand. The April sun was shining into the wood. A larch beyond Letty was already green, and the twigs of the oak beneath which she sat made a reddish glow in the bright air. Patches of primroses and anemones starred the ground about her, and trails of periwinkle touched her dress. She was stooping, and her little hand went rapidly — impatiently — to and fro.

The contrast between this fresh youth amid the spring and that unlovely, reluctant age he had just left behind him in the smoking-room struck him sharply. His brow cleared.

As she heard his step she looked round eagerly. "Well?" she said, pushing aside her work.

He threw himself down beside her.

"Darling, I have had my talk. It is pretty bad —worse than we had even imagined!"

Then he told her his mother's story. She could hardly contain herself, as she listened, as he mentioned the total figure of the debts. It was evidently with difficulty that she prevented herself from interrupting him at every word. And when he had barely finished she broke out:

"And what did you say?"

George hesitated.

"I told her, of course, that it was monstrous and absurd to expect that we could pay such a sum."

Letty's breath came fast. His voice and manner did not satisfy her at all.

"Monstrous? I should think it was! Do you know how she has run up this debt?"

George looked at her in surprise. Her little face was quivering under the suppressed energy of what she was going to say.

"No!—do you?"

"Yes!—I know all about it. I said to my maid last night—I hope, George, you won't mind, but you know Grier has been an age with me, and knows all my secrets—I told her she must make friends with your mother's maid, and see what she could find out. I felt we *must*, in self-defence. And of course Grier got it all out of Justine. I knew she would! Justine is a little fool; and she doesn't mean to stay much longer with Lady Tressady, so she didn't mind

speaking. It is exactly as I supposed! Lady Tressady didn't begin speculating for herself at all — but for — somebody — else! Do you remember that absurd-looking singer who gave a 'musical sketch' one day that your mother gave a party in Eccleston Square — in February?"

She looked at him with eagerness, an ugly, half-shrinking innuendo in her expression.

George had suddenly moved away, and was sitting now some little distance from his wife, his eyes bent on the ground. However, at her question he made a sign of assent.

"You do remember? Well," said Letty, triumphantly, "it is he who is at the bottom of it all. I *knew* there must be somebody. It appears that he has been getting money out of her for years — that he used to come and spend hours, when she had that little house in Bruton Street, when you were away — I don't believe you ever heard of it — flattering her, and toadying her, paying her compliments on her dress and her appearance, fetching and carrying for her — and of course living upon her! He used to arrange all her parties. Justine says that he used even to make her order all his favourite wines — *such* bills as there used to be for wine! He has a wife and children somewhere, and of course the whole family lived upon your mother. It was he made her begin speculating. Justine says he has lost all he ever had himself that way, and your mother couldn't, in fact, '*lend*' him" — Letty laughed scornfully — "money fast enough. It was he brought her across that odious creature Shapetsky — isn't that his name?

And that's the whole story. If there have been any gains, he has made off with them — leaving her, of course, to get out of the rest. Justine says that for months there was nothing but business, as she calls it, talked in the house — and she knew, for she used to help wait at dinner. And such a crew of people as used to be about the place!"

She looked at him, struck at last by his silence and his attitude, or pausing for some comment, some appreciation of her cleverness in ferreting it all out.

But he did not speak, and she was puzzled. The angry triumph in her eyes faltered. She put out her hand and touched him on the arm.

"What is it, George? I thought — it would be more satisfactory to us both to know the truth."

He looked up quickly.

"And all this your maid got out of Justine? You asked her?"

She was struck, offended, by his expression. It was so cool and strange — even, she could have imagined, contemptuous.

"Yes, I did," she said passionately. "I thought I was quite justified. We must protect ourselves."

He was silent again.

"I think," he said at last, drily, she watching him — "I think we will keep Justine and Grier out of it, if you please."

She took her work, and laid it down again, her mouth trembling.

"So you had rather be deceived?"

"I had rather be deceived than listen behind doors," he said, beginning in a light tone, which, however,

passed immediately into one of bitterness. "Besides, there is nothing new. For people like my mother there is always some adventurer or adventuress in the background — there always used to be in old days. She never meant any serious harm: she was first plundered, then we. My father used to be for ever turning some impostor or other out of doors. Now I suppose it is my turn."

This time it was Letty who kept silence. Her needle passed rapidly to and fro. George glanced at her queerly. Then he rose and came to stand near her, leaning against the tree.

"You know, Letty, we shall have to pay that money," he said suddenly, pulling at his moustache.

Letty made an exclamation under her breath, but went on working faster than before.

He slipped down to the moss beside her, and caught her hand.

"Are you angry with me?"

"If you insult me by accusing me of listening behind doors you can't wonder," said Letty, snatching her hand away, her breast heaving.

He felt a bitter inclination to laugh, but he restrained it, and did his best to make peace. In the midst of his propitiations Letty turned upon him.

"Of course, I know you think I did it all for selfishness," she said, half crying, "because I want new furniture and new dresses. I don't; I want to protect you from being — being — plundered like this. How can you do what you ought as a member of Parliament? how can we ever keep ourselves out of debt if — if —? How *can* you pay this money?" she wound up, her eyes flaming.

"Well, you know," he said, hesitating — "you know I suggested yesterday we should sell some land to do up the house. I am afraid we must sell the land, and pay this scoundrel — a proportion, at all events. Of course, what I should *like* to do would be to put him — and the other — to instant death, with appropriate tortures! Short of that, I can only take the matter out of my mother's hands, get a sharp solicitor on my side to match *his* rascal, and make the best bargain I can."

Letty rolled up her work with energy, two tears of anger on her cheeks. "She *ought* to suffer!" she cried, her voice trembling — "she *ought* to suffer!"

"You mean that we ought to let her be made a bankrupt?" he said coolly. "Well, no doubt it would be salutary. Only, I am afraid it would be rather more disagreeable to us than to her. Suppose we consider the situation. Two young married people — charming house — charming wife — husband just beginning in politics — people inclined to be friends. Then you go to dine with them in Brook Street — excellent little French dinner — bride bewitching. Next morning you see the bankruptcy of the host's mamma in the 'Times.' 'And he's the only son, isn't he? — he must be well off. They say she's been dreadfully extravagant. But, hang it! you know, a man's mother! — and a widow — no, I can't stand that. Sha'n't dine with them again!' There! do you see, darling? Do you really want to rub all the bloom off the peach?"

He had hardly finished his little speech before the odiousness of it struck himself.

"Am I come to talking to her like *this?*" he asked himself in a kind of astonishment.

But Letty, apparently, was not astonished.

"Everybody would understand if you refused to ruin yourself by going on paying these frightful debts. I am sure *something* could be done," she said, half choked.

George shook his head.

"But everybody wouldn't want to understand. The dear world loves a scandal — doesn't really *like* being amiable to newcomers at all. You would make a bad start, dear — and all the world would pity mamma."

"Oh! if you are only thinking what people would say," cried Letty.

"No," said George, reflectively, but with a mild change of tone. "Damn people! I can pull myself to pieces so much better than they can. You see, darling, you're such an optimist. Now, if you'd only just believe, as I do, that the world is a radically bad place, you wouldn't be so surprised when things of this sort happen. Eh, little person, has it been a radically bad place this last fortnight?"

He laid his cheek against her shoulder, rubbing it gently up and down. But something hard and scornful lay behind his caress — something he did not mean to inquire into.

"Then you told your mother," said Letty, after a pause, still looking straight before her, "that you would clear her?"

"Not at all. I said we could do nothing. I laid it on about the house. And all the time I knew perfectly well in my protesting soul, that if this man's claim is sustainable we should *have* to pay up. And I imagine that mamma knew it too. You can get out

of anybody's debts but your mother's — that's apparently what it comes to. Queer thing, civilisation! Well now" — he sprang to his feet — "let's go and get it over."

Letty also rose.

"I can't see her again," she said quickly. "I sha'n't come down to lunch. Will she go by the three-o'clock train?"

"I will arrange it," said George.

They walked through the wood together silently. As they came in sight of the house Letty's face quivered again with restrained passion — or tears. George, whose *sangfroid* was never disturbed outwardly for long, had by now resigned himself, and had, moreover, recovered that tolerance of woman's various weaknesses which was in him the fruit of a wide, and at bottom hostile, induction. He set himself to cheer her up. Perhaps, after all, if he could sell a particular piece of land which he owned near a neighbouring large town, and sell it well, — he had had offers for it before, — he might be able to clear his mother, and still let Letty work her will on the house. She mustn't take a gloomy view of things — he would do his best. So that by the time they got into the drawing-room she had let her hand slip doubtfully into his again for a moment.

But nothing would induce her to appear at lunch. Lady Tressady, having handed over all Shapetsky's papers and all her responsibilities to George, graciously told him that she could understand Letty's annoyance, and didn't wish for a moment to intrude upon her. She then called on Justine to curl her

hair, put on a blue shot silk with marvellous pink fronts just arrived from Paris, and came down to lunch with her son in her most smiling mood. She took no notice of his monosyllables, and in the hall, while the butler discreetly retired, she kissed him with tears, saying that she had always known his generosity would come to the rescue of his poor darling mamma.

"You will oblige me, mother, by not trying it again too soon," was George's ironical reply as he put her into the carriage.

In the afternoon Letty was languid and depressed. She would not talk on general topics, and George shrank in nervous disgust from reopening the subjects of the morning. Finally, she chose to be tucked up on the sofa with a novel, and gave George free leave to go out.

It surprised him to find as he walked quickly down the hill, delighting in the April sun, that he was glad to be alone. But he did not in the least try to fling the thought away from him, as many a lover would have done. The events, the feelings of the day, had been alike jarring and hateful; he meant to escape from them.

But he could not escape from them all at once. A fresh and unexpected debt of somewhere about four thousand pounds does not sit lightly on a comparatively poor man. In spite of his philosophy for Letty's benefit, he must needs harass himself anew about his money affairs, planning and reckoning. How many more such surprises would his mother

spring upon him — and how was he to control her? He realised now something of the life-long burden his dull old father had borne — a burden which the absences of school, college, and travel had hitherto spared himself. What was he to appeal to in her? There seemed to be nothing — neither will nor conscience. She was like the women without backs in the fairy-tale.

Then, with one breath he said to himself that he must kick out that singer-fellow, and with the next, that he would not touch any of his mother's crew with a barge-pole. Though he never pleaded ideals in public, he had been all his life something of a moral epicure, taking "moral" as relating rather to manners than to deeper things. He had done his best not to soil himself by contact with certain types — among men especially. Of women he was less critical and less observant.

As to this ugly feud opening between his mother and his wife, it had quite ceased to amuse him. Now that his marriage was a reality, the daily corrosion of such a thing was becoming plain. And who was there in the world to bear the brunt of it but he? He saw himself between the two — eternally trying to make peace — and his face lengthened.

And if Letty would only leave the thing to him! — would only keep her little white self out of it! He wished he could get her to send away that woman Grier — a forward second-rate creature, much too ready to meddle in what did not concern her.

Then, with a shake of his thin shoulders, he passionately drove it all out of his thoughts.

Let him go to the village, sound the feeling there if he could, and do his employer's business. His troubles as a pit-owner seemed likely to be bad enough, but they did not canker one like domestic miseries. They were a man's natural affairs; to think of them came as a relief to him.

He had but a disappointing round, however.

In the first place he went to look up some of the older "hewers," men who had been for years in the employ of the Tressadys. Two or three of them had just come back from the early shift, and their wives, at any rate, were pleased and flattered by George's call. But the men sat like stocks and stones while he talked. Scarcely a word could be got out of them, and George felt himself in an atmosphere of storm, guessing at dangers, everywhere present, though not yet let loose — like the foul gases in the pits under his feet.

He behaved with a good deal of dignity, stifling his pride here and there sufficiently to talk simply and well of the general state of trade, the conditions of the coal industry in the West Mercian district, the position of the masters, the published accounts of one or two large companies in the district, and so on. But in the end he only felt his own anger rising in answer to the sullenness of the men. Their sallow faces and eyes weakened by long years of the pit expressed little — but what there was spelt war.

Nor did his visits to what might be called his own side give him much more satisfaction.

One man, a brawny "fireman," whom George had

been long taught to regard as one of the props of law and order in the district, was effusively and honestly glad to see his employer. His wife hurried the tea, and George drank and ate as heartily as his own luncheon would let him in company with Macgregor and his very neat and smiling family. Nothing could be more satisfactory than Macgregor's general denunciations of the Union and its agent. Burrows, in his opinion, was a "drunken, low-livin scoundrel," who got his bread by making mischief; the Union was entering upon a great mistake in resisting the masters' proposals; and if it weren't for the public-house and idleness there wasn't a man in Ferth that couldn't live *well*, ten per cent. reduction and all considered. Nevertheless, he did not conceal his belief that battle was approaching, and would break out, if not now, at any rate in the late summer or autumn. Times, too, were going to be specially bad for the non-society men. The membership of the Union had been running up fast; there had been a row that very morning at the pit where he worked, the Union men refusing to go down in the same cage with the blacklegs. He and his mates would have to put their backs into it. Never fear but they would! Bullying might be trusted only to make them the more "orkard."

Nothing could have been more soothing than such talk to the average employer in search of congenial opinions. But George was not the average employer, and the fastidious element in him began soon to make him uncomfortable. Sobriety is, no doubt, admirable, but he had no sooner detected a teetotal cant in his companion than that particular axiom ceased to matter

to him. And to think poorly of Burrows might be a salutary feature in a man's character, but it should be for some respectable reason. George fidgeted on his chair while Macgregor told the usual cock-and-bull stories of monstrous hotel-bills seen sticking out of Burrows's tail-pockets, and there deciphered by a gaping populace; and his mental discomfort reached its climax when Macgregor wound up with the remark:

"And *that*, Sir George, is where the money goes to!—not to the poor starving women and children, I can tell yer, whose husbands are keepin him in luxury. I've always said it. *Where's the accounts?* I've never seen no balance-sheet—*never!*" he repeated solemnly. "They do say as there's one to be seen at the 'lodge'—"

"Why, of course there is, Macgregor," said George, with a nervous laugh, as he got up to depart; "all the big Unions publish their accounts."

The fireman's obstinate mouth and stubbly hair only expressed a more pronounced scepticism.

"Well, I shouldn't believe in em," he said, "if they did. I've niver seen a balance-sheet, and I don't suppose I ever shall. Well, good-bye to you, Sir George, and thank you kindly. Yo take my word, sir, if it weren't for the public-house the men could afford to lose a trifle now and again to let the masters make their fair profit!"

And he looked behind him complacently at his neat cottage and well-clothed children.

But George walked away, impatient.

"*His* wages won't go down, anyway," he said to himself—for the wages of the "firemen," whose work

is of the nature of superintendence, hardly vary with the state of trade. "And what suspicious idiocy about the accounts!"

His last visit was the least fortunate of any. The fireman in question, Mark Dowse, Macgregor's chief rival in the village, was a keen Radical, and George found him chuckling over his newspaper, and the defeat of the Tory candidate in a recently decided County Council election. He received his visitor with a surprise which George thought not untinged with insolence. Some political talk followed, in which Dowse's Yorkshire wit scored more than once at his employer's expense. Dowse, indeed, let himself go. He was on the point of taking the examination for an under-manager's certificate and leaving the valley. Hence there were no strong reasons for servility, and he might talk as he pleased to a young "swell" who had sold himself to reaction. George lost his temper somewhat, was furiously ashamed of himself, and could only think of getting out of the man's company with dignity.

He was by no means clear, however, as he walked away from the cottage, that he had succeeded in doing so. What was the good of trying to make friends with these fellows? Neither in agreement nor in opposition had he any common ground with them. Other people might have the gifts for managing them; it seemed to him that it would be better for him to take up the line at once that he had none. Fontenoy was right. Nothing but a state of enmity was possible — veiled enmity at some times, open at others.

What were those voices on the slope above him?

He was walking along a road which skirted his own group of pits. To his left rose a long slope of refuse, partly grown over, ending in the "bank" whereon stood the engine-house and winding-apparatus. A pathway climbed the slope and made the natural ascent to the pit for people dwelling in the scattered cottages on the farther side of it.

Two men, he saw, were standing high up on the pathway, violently disputing. One was Madan, his own manager, an excellent man of business and a bitter Tory. The other was Valentine Burrows.

As Tressady neared the road-entrance to the pathway the two men parted. Madan climbed on towards the pit. Burrows ran down the path.

As he approached the gate, and saw Tressady passing on the road, the agent called:

"Sir George Tressady!"

George stopped.

Burrows came quickly up to him, his face crimson.

"Is it by your orders, Sir George, that Mr. Madan insults and browbeats me when he meets me on a perfectly harmless errand to one of the men in your engine-house?"

"Perhaps Mr. Madan was not so sure as you were, Mr. Burrows, that the errand *was* a harmless one," said George, with a cool smile.

By this time, however, Burrows was biting his lip, and very conscious that he had made an impulsive mistake.

"Don't imagine for a moment," he said hotly, "that Madan's opinion of anything I may be doing matters one brass farthing to me! Only I give you and him

fair warning that if he blackguards me again in the way he has done several times lately, I shall have him bound over."

"He might survive it," said George. "But how will you manage it? You have had ill-luck, rather, with the magistrates — haven't you?"

He stood drawn up to his full height, thin, venomous, alert, rather enjoying the encounter, which "let off the steam" of his previous irritations.

Burrows threw him a furious look.

"You think that a damaging thing to say, do you, Sir George? Perhaps the day will come — not so far off, neither — when the magistrates will be no longer your creatures, but ours. Then we shall see!"

"Well, prophecy is cheap," said George. "Console yourself with it, by all means."

The two men measured each other eye to eye.

Then, unexpectedly, after the relief of his outburst, the philosopher's instincts which were so oddly interwoven with the rest of Tressady's nature reasserted themselves.

"Look here," he said, in another manner, advancing a step. "I think this is all great nonsense. If Madan has exceeded his duty, I will see to it. And, meanwhile, don't you think it would be more worthy of us, as a couple of rational beings, if, now we have met, we had a few serious words on the state of things in this valley? You and I fought a square fight at Malford — you at least said as much. Why can't we fight a square fight here?"

Burrows eyed him doubtfully. He was leaning on his stick, recovering breath and composure. George

noticed that since the Malford election, even he had lost youth and looks. He had the drunkard's skin and the drunkard's eyes. Yet there were still the make and proportions of the handsome athlete. He was now a man of about thirty-two; but in his first youth he had carried the miner's pick for some four or five years, and during the same period had been one of the most famous football-players of the county. As George knew, he was still the idol of the local clubs, and capable in his sober spells of amazing feats both of strength and endurance.

"Well, I have no objection to some conversation with you," said Burrows, at last, slowly.

"Let's walk on, then," said George.

And they walked past the gate of Ferth, towards the railway-station, which was some two miles off.

About an hour later the two men returned along the same road. Both had an air of tension; both were rather pale.

"Well, it comes to this," said George, as he stopped beside his own gate, "you believe our case — the badness of trade, the disappearance of profits, pressure of contracts, and all the rest of it — and you still refuse on your part to bear the smallest fraction of the burden? You will claim all you can get in good times — you will give back nothing in bad?"

"That is so," said Burrows, deliberately; "that is so, *precisely*. We will take no risks; we give our labour and in return the workman must live. Make the consumer pay, or pay yourselves out of your good years" — he turned imperceptibly towards the barrack-like house on the hill. "We don't care a ha'porth

which it is! — only don't you come on the man who risks his life, and works like a galley-slave five days a week for a pittance of five-and-twenty shillings, or thereabouts, to pay — for he *won't*. He's tired of it. Not till you starve him into it, at any rate!"

George laughed.

"One of the best men in the village has been giving me his opinion this afternoon that there isn't a man in that place" — he pointed to it — "that couldn't live, and live well — aye, and take the masters' terms to-morrow — but for the drink!"

His keen look ran over Burrows from head to foot.

"And I know who *that* is," said Burrows, with a sneer. "Well, I can tell you what the rest of the men in that place think, and it's this: that the man in that village who *doesn't* drink is a mean skunk, who's betraying his own flesh and blood to the capitalists! Oh! you may preach at us till you're black in the face, but drink we *shall* till we get the control of our own labour. For, look here! Directly we cease to drink — directly we become good boys on your precious terms — the standard of life falls, down come wages, and *you* sweep off our beer-money to spend on your champagne. Thank you, Sir George! but we're not such fools as we look — and that don't suit us! Good-day to you."

And he haughtily touched his hat in response to George's movement, and walked quickly away.

George slowly mounted his own hill. The chequered April day was declining, and the dipping sun was flooding the western plain with quiet light.

Rooks were circling round the hill, filling the air with long-drawn sound. A cuckoo was calling on a tree near at hand, and the evening was charged with spring scents — scents of leaf and grass, of earth and rain. Below, in an oak copse across the road, a stream rushed; and from a distance came the familiar rattle and thud of the pits.

George stood still a moment under a ragged group of Scotch firs — one of the few things at Ferth that he loved — and gazed across the Cheshire border to the distant lines of Welsh hills. The excitement of his talk with Burrows was subsiding, leaving behind it the obstinate resolve of the natural man. He should tell his uncles there was nothing for it but to fight it out. Some blood must be let; somebody must be master.

What poor limited fools, after all, were the best of the working men — how incapable of working out any serious problem, of looking beyond their own noses and the next meal! Was he to spend his life in chronic battle with them — a set of semi-civilised barbarians — his countrymen in nothing but the name? And for what cause — to what cry? That he might defend against the toilers of this wide valley a certain elegant house in Brook Street, and find the means to go on paying his mother's debts? — such debts as he carried the evidence of, at that moment, in his pocket.

Suddenly there swept over his mind with pricking force the thought of Mary Batchelor at her door, blind with weeping and pain — of the poor boy, dead in his prime. Did those two figures stand for the *realities* at

the base of things — the common labours, affections, agonies, which uphold the world?

His own life looked somehow poor and mean to him as he turned back to it. The Socialist of course — Burrows — would say that he and Letty and his mother were merely living, and dressing, and enjoying themselves, paying butlers, and starting carriages out of the labour and pain of others — that Jamie Batchelor and his like risked and brutalised their strong young lives that Lady Tressady and her like might "jig and amble" through theirs.

Pure ignorant fanaticism, no doubt! But he was not so ready as usual to shelter himself under the big words of controversy. Fontenoy's favourite arguments had momentarily no savour for a kind of moral nausea.

"I begin to see it was a 'cursed spite' that drove me into the business at all," he said to himself, as he stood under the trees.

What he was really suffering from was an impatience of new conditions — perhaps surprise that he was not more equal to them. Till his return home — till now, almost — he had been an employer and a coal-owner by proxy. Other people had worked for him, had solved his problems for him. Then a transient impulse had driven him home — made him accept Fontenoy's offer — worse luck! — at least, Letty apart! The hopefulness and elation about himself, his new activities, and his Parliamentary prospects, that had been his predominant mood in London seemed to him at this moment of depression mere folly. What he really felt, he declared to himself, was a sort of

cowardly shrinking from life and its tests — the recognition that at bottom he was a weakling, without faiths, without true identity.

Then the quick thought-process, as it flowed on, told him that there are two things that protect men of his stamp from their own lack of moral stamina: perpetual change of scene, that turns the world into a spectacle — and love. He thought with hunger of his travel-years; holding away from him, as it were, for a moment the thought of his marriage.

But only for a moment. It was but a few weeks since a woman's life had given itself wholly into his hands. He was still thrilling under the emotion and astonishment of it. Tender, melting thoughts flowed upon him. His little Letty! Had he ever thought her perfect, free from natural covetousness and weaknesses? What folly! *He* to ask for the grand style in character!

He looked at his watch. How long he had left her! Let him hurry, and make his peace.

However, just as he was turning, his attention was caught by something that was passing on the opposite hillside. The light from the west was shining full on a white cottage with a sloping garden. The cottage belonged to the Wesleyan minister of the place, and had been rented by Burrows for the last six months. And just as George was turning away he saw Burrows come out of the door with a burden — a child, or a woman little larger than a child — in his arms. He carried her to an armchair which had been placed on the little grass-plat. The figure was almost lost in the chair, and sat motionless while Burrows brought

cushions and a stool. Then a baby came to play on the grass, and Burrows hung over the back of the chair, bending so as to talk to the person in it.

"Dying?" said George to himself. "Poor devil! he must hate something."

He sped up the hill, and found Letty still on the sofa and in the last pages of her novel. She did not resent his absence apparently, — a freedom, so far, from small exaction for which he inwardly thanked her. Still, from the moment that she raised her eyes as he came in, he saw that if she was not angry with him for leaving her alone, her mind was still as sore as ever against him and fortune on other accounts — and his revived ardour drooped. He gave her an account of his adventures, but she was neither inquiring nor sympathetic; and her manner all the evening had a nervous dryness that took away the pleasure of their *tête-à-tête*. Any old friend of Letty's, indeed, could hardly have failed to ask what had become of that small tinkling charm of manner, that girlish flippancy and repartee, that had counted for so much in George's first impressions of her? They were no sooner engaged than it had begun to wane. Was it like the bird or the flower, that adorns itself only for the wooing time, and sinks into relative dinginess when the mating effort is over?

On this particular evening, indeed, she was really absorbed half the time in gloomy thoughts of Lady Tressady's behaviour and the poorness of her own prospects. She lay on the sofa again after dinner — her white slimness and bright hair showing delicately

against the cushions — playing still with her novel, while George read the newspapers. Sometimes she glanced at him unsteadily, with a pinching of the lips. But it was not her way to invite a scene.

Late at night he went up to his dressing-room.

As he entered it Letty was talking to her maid. He stopped involuntarily in the darkness of his own room, and listened. What a contrast between this Letty and the Letty of the drawing-room! They were chattering fast, discussing Lady Tressady, and Lady Tressady's gowns, and Lady Tressady's affairs. What eagerness, what malice, what feminine subtlety and acuteness! After listening for a few seconds, it seemed to him as though a score of new and ugly lights had been thrown alike upon his mother and on human nature. He stole away again without revealing himself.

When he returned the room was nearly dark, and Letty was lying high against her pillows, waiting for him. Suddenly, after she had sent her maid away, she had felt depressed and miserable, and had begun to cry. And for some reason hardly clear to herself she had lain pining for George's footstep. When he came in she looked at him with eyes still wet, reproaching him gently for being late.

In the dim light, surrounded with lace and whiteness, she was a pretty vision; and George stood beside her, responding and caressing.

But that black depth in his nature, of which he had spoken to her — which he had married to forget — was, none the less, all ruffled and vocal. For the first time since Letty had consented to marry him he did not think or say to himself, as he looked at her, that he was a lucky man, and had done everything for the best.

CHAPTER X

Thus, with the end of the honeymoon, whatever hopes or illusions George Tressady had allowed himself in marrying, were already much bedimmed. His love-dream had been meagre and ordinary enough. But even so, it had not maintained itself.

Nevertheless, such impressions and emotions pass. The iron fact of marriage outstays them, tends always to modify, and, at first, to conquer them.

Upon the Tressadys' return to London, Letty, at any rate, endeavoured to forget her great defeat of the honeymoon in the excitement of furnishing the house in Brook Street. Certainly there could be no question, in spite of all her high speech to Miss Tulloch and others, that in her first encounter with Lady Tressady, Lady Tressady had won easily. Letty had forgotten to reckon on the hard realities of the filial relation, and could only think of them now, partly with exasperation, partly with despair.

Lady Tressady, however, was for the moment somewhat subdued, and on the return of the young people to town she did her best to propitiate Letty. In Letty's eyes, indeed, her offence was beyond reparation. But, for the moment, there was outward amity at least between them; which for Letty meant chiefly that she was conscious of making all her purchases

for the house and planning all her housekeeping arrangements under a constant critical inspection; and, moreover, that she was liable to find all her afternoon-teas with particular friends, or those persons of whom she wished to make particular friends, broken up by the advent of the overdressed and berouged lady, who first put the guests to flight, and was then out of temper because they fled.

Meanwhile George found the Shapetsky matter extremely harassing. He put on a clever lawyer; but the Shapetsky would have scorned to be overmatched by anybody else's abilities, and very little abatement could be obtained. Moreover, the creditor's temper had been roughened by a somewhat unfortunate letter George had written in a hurry from Ferth, and he showed every sign of carrying matters with as high a hand as possible.

Meanwhile, George was discovering, like any other landowner, how easy it is to talk of selling land, how difficult to sell it. The buyer who would once have bought was not now forthcoming; the few people who nibbled were, naturally, thinking more of their own purses than Tressady's; and George grew red with indignation over some of the offers submitted to him by his country solicitor. With the payment of a first large instalment to Shapetsky out of his ordinary account, he began to be really pressed for money, just as the expenses of the Brook Street settling-in were at their height. This pecuniary strain had a marked effect upon him. It brought out certain features of character which he no doubt inherited from his father. Old Sir William had always shown a scrupulous and

petty temper in money matters. He could not increase his possessions: for that he had apparently neither brains nor judgment; nor could he even protect himself from the more serious losses of business, for George found heavy debts in existence — mortgages on the pits and so forth — when he succeeded. But as the head of a household Sir William showed extraordinary tenacity and spirit in the defence of his petty cash; and the exasperating extravagance of the wife whom, in a moment of infatuation, he had been cajoled into marrying, intensified and embittered a natural characteristic.

George so far resembled him that both at school and college he had been a rather careful and abstemious boy. Probably the spectacle of his mother's adventures had revealed to him very early the humiliations of the debtor. At any rate, during his four years abroad he had never exceeded the modest yearly sum he had reserved for himself on leaving England; and the frugality of his personal expenditure had counted for something in the estimates formed of him during his travels by competent persons.

Nevertheless, at this beginning of household life he was still young and callow in all that concerned the management of money; and it had never occurred to him that his somewhat uncertain income of about four thousand a year would not be amply sufficient for anything that he and Letty might need; for housekeeping, for children — if children came — for political expenses, and even for those supplementary presents to his mother which he had all along recognised as inevitable. Now, however, what with the difficulty

he found in settling the Shapetsky affair, what with Letty's demands for the house, and his revived dread of what his mother might be doing, together with his overdrawn account and the position of his colliery property, a secret fear of embarrassment and disaster began to torment him, the offspring of a temperament which had never perhaps possessed any real buoyancy.

Occasionally, under the stimulus of this fear, he would leave the House of Commons on a Wednesday or Saturday afternoon, walk to Warwick Square, and appear precipitately in his mother's drawing-room, for the purpose of examining the guests — or possible harpies — who might be gathered there. He did his best once or twice to dislodge the "singer-fellow" — an elderly gentleman with a flabby face and long hair, who seemed to George to be equally boneless, physically and morally. Nevertheless, he was not to be dislodged. The singer, indeed, treated the young legislator with a mixture of deference and artistic condescension, which was amusing or enraging as you chose to take it. And once, when George attempted very plain language with his mother, Lady Tressady went into hysterics, and vowed that she would not be parted from her friends, not even by the brutality of young married people who had everything they wanted, while she was a poor lone widow, whose life was not worth living. The whole affair was, so to speak, sordidly innocent. Mr. Fullerton — such was the gentleman's name — wanted creature-comforts and occasional loans; Lady Tressady wanted company, compliments, and "musical sketches" for her little tea-parties. Mrs. Fullerton was as ready as her husband to supply

the two former; and even the children, a fair-haired, lethargic crew, painfully like their boneless father in Tressady's opinion, took their share in the general exploitation of Tressady's mamma. Lady Tressady meanwhile posed as the benefactor of genius in distress; and vowed, moreover, that "poor dear Fullerton" was in no way responsible for her recent misfortunes. The "reptile," and the "reptile" only, was to blame.

After one of these skirmishes with his mother, George, ruffled and disgusted, took his way home, to find Letty eagerly engaged in choosing silk curtains for the drawing-room.

"Oh! how lucky!" she cried, when she saw him. "Now you can help me decide — *such* a business!"

And she led him into the drawing-room, where lengths of pink and green brocade were pinned against the wall in conspicuous places.

George admired, and gave his verdict in favour of a particular green. Then he stooped to read the ticket on the corner of the pattern, and his face fell.

"How much will you want of this stuff, Letty?" he asked her.

"Oh! for the two rooms, nearly fifty yards," said Letty, carelessly, opening another bundle of patterns as she spoke.

"It is twenty-six shillings a yard!" said George, rather gloomily, as he fell, tired, into an armchair.

"Well, yes, it *is* dear. But then, it is so good that it will last an age. I think I must have some of it for the sofa, too," said Letty, pondering.

George made no reply.

Presently Letty looked up.

"Why, George? — George, what *is* the matter? Don't you want anything pretty for this room? You never take any interest in it at all."

"I'm only thinking, darling, what fortunes the upholsterers must make," said George, his hands pent-house over his eyes.

Letty pouted and flushed. The next minute she came to sit on the edge of his chair. She was dressed — rather overdressed, perhaps — in a pale blue dress whereof the inventive ruffles and laces pleased her own critical mind extremely. George, well accustomed by now to the items in his mother's bills, felt uncomfortably, as he looked at the elegance beside him, that it was a question of guineas — many guineas. Then he hated himself for not simply admiring her — his pretty little bride — in her new finery. What was wrong with him? This beastly money had put everything awry!

Letty guessed shrewdly at what was the matter. She bit her lip, and looked ready to cry.

"Well, it *is* hard," she said, in a low, emphatic voice, "that we can't please ourselves in a few trifles of this sort — when one thinks *why!*"

George took her hand, and kissed it affectionately.

"Darling, only just for a little — till I get out of this brute's clutches. There are such pretty, cheap things nowadays — aren't there?"

"Oh! if you want to have a South Kensington drawing-room," said Letty, indignantly, "with fourpenny muslin curtains and art pots, you can do *that* for nothing. But I'd rather go back to horsehair and a mahogany table in the middle at once!"

"You needn't wear 'greenery-yallery' gowns, you know," said George, laughing; "that's the one unpardonable thing. Though, if you did wear them, you'd become them."

And he held her at arm's length that he might properly admire her new dress.

Letty, however, was not to be flattered out of her lawful dues in the matter of curtains — that Lady Tressady's debts might be paid the sooner. She threw herself into a long wrestle with George, half angry, half plaintive, and in the end she wrung out of him much more considerable matters than the brocades originally in dispute. Then George went down to his study, pricked in his conscience, and vaguely sore with Letty. Why? Women in his eyes were made for silken gauds and trinkets: it was the price that men were bound to pay them for their society. He had watched the same sort of process that had now been applied to himself many times already in one or more of the Anglo-Indian households with which he had grown familiar, and had been philosophically amused by it. But the little comedy, transferred to his own hearth, seemed somehow to have lost humour and point.

Still, with two young people, under thirty, just entering upon that fateful second act of the play of life which makes or mars us all, moments of dissatisfaction and depression — even with Shapetskys and Lady Tressadys in the background — were but rare specks in the general sum of pleasure. George had fallen once more under the Parliamentary illusion,

as soon as he was again within reach of the House of Commons and in frequent contact with Fontenoy. The link between him and his strange leader grew daily stronger as they sat side by side, through some hard-fought weeks of Supply, throwing the force of their little group now on the side of the Government, now on that of the Opposition, always vigilant, and often successful. George became necessary to Fontenoy in a hundred ways; for the younger man had a mass of *connaissances*, — to use the irreplaceable French word, — the result of his more normal training and his four years of intelligent travel, which Fontenoy was almost wholly without. Many a blunder did George save his chief; and no one could have offered his brains for the picking with a heartier goodwill. On the other hand, the instinctive strength and acuteness of Fontenoy's judgment were unmatched, according to Tressady's belief, in the House of Commons. He was hardly ever deceived in a man, or in the significant points of a situation. His followers never dreamt of questioning his verdict on a point of tactics. They followed him blindly; and if the gods sent defeat, no one blamed Fontenoy. But in success his grunt of approval or congratulation rewarded the curled young aristocrats who made the nucleus of his party as nothing else did; while none of his band ever affronted or overrode him with impunity. He wielded a natural kingship, and, the more battered and gnarled became his physical presence, the more remarkable was his moral ascendency.

One discouragement, however, he and his group suffered during the weeks between Easter and Whit-

suntide. They were hungry for battle, and the best of the battle was for the moment denied them; for, owing to a number of controverted votes in Supply and the slipping-in of two or three inevitable debates on pressing matters of current interest, the Second Reading of the Maxwell Bill was postponed till after Whitsuntide, when it was certainly to take precedence. There was a good deal of grumbling in the House, led by Fontenoy; but the Government could only vow that they had no choice, and that their adversaries could not possibly be more eager to fight than they were to be fought.

Life, then, on this public side, though not so keen as it would be presently, was still rich and stirring. And meanwhile society showed itself gracious to the bride and bridegroom. Letty's marriage had made her unusually popular for the time with her own acquaintance. For it might be called success; yet it was not of too dazzling a degree. What, therefore, with George's public and Parliamentary relations, the calls of officials, the attentions of personal friends, and the good offices of Mrs. Watton, who was loftily determined to "launch" her niece, Letty was always well pleased with the look of her hall-table and the cards upon it when she returned home in her new brougham from her afternoon round. She left them there for George to see, and it delighted her particularly if Lady Tressady came in during the interval.

Meanwhile they dined with many folk, and made preliminary acquaintance with the great ones of the land. Letty's vanity swelled within her as she read over the list of her engagements. Nevertheless, she

often came home from her dinner-parties flat and disappointed. She did not feel that she made way; and she found herself constantly watching the triumphs of other women with annoyance or perplexity. What was wrong with her? Her dress was irreproachable, and, stirred by this great roaring world, she recalled for it the little airs and graces she had almost ceased to spend on George. But she constantly found herself, as she thought, neglected; while the slightest word or look of some happy person in a simple gown, near by, had power to bring about her that flattering crowd of talkers and of courtiers for which Letty pined.

The Maxwells called very early on the newly wedded pair, and left an invitation to dinner with their cards. But, to Letty's chagrin, she and George were already engaged for the evening named, and when they duly presented themselves at St. James's Square on a Sunday afternoon, it was to find that the Maxwells were in the country. Once or twice in some crowded room Letty or George had a few hurried words with Lady Maxwell, and Marcella would try to plan a meeting. But what with her engagements and theirs, nothing that she suggested could be done.

"Ah! well, after Whitsuntide," she said, smiling, to Letty one evening that they had interchanged a few words of polite regret on the stairs at some official party. "I will write to you in the country, if I may. Ferth Place, is it not?"

"No," said Letty, with easy dignity; "we shall not be at home, — not at first, at any rate. We are going for two or three days to Mrs. Allison, at Castle Luton."

"Are you? You will have a pleasant time. Such a glorious old house!"

And Lady Maxwell swept on; not so fast, however, but that she found time to have a few words of Parliamentary chat with Tressady on the landing.

Letty made her little speech about Castle Luton with a delightful sense of playing the rare and favoured part. Nothing in her London career, so far, had pleased her so much as Mrs. Allison's call and Mrs. Allison's invitation. For, although on the few occasions when she had seen this gentle, white-haired lady, Letty had never felt for one moment at ease with her, still, there could be no question that Mrs. Allison was, socially, distinction itself. She had a following among all parties. For although she was Fontenoy's friend and inspirer, a strong Church-woman, and a great aristocrat, she had that delicate, long-descended charm which shuts the lions' mouths, and makes it possible for certain women to rule in any company. Even those who were most convinced that the Mrs. Allisons of this world are the chief obstacles in the path of progress, deliberated when they were asked to Castle Luton, and fell — protesting. And for a certain world, high-born, cultivated, and virtuous, she was almost a figure of legend, so widespread was the feeling she inspired, and so many were the associations and recollections that clustered about her.

So that when her cards, those of her son Lord Ancoats, and a little accompanying note in thin French handwriting — Mrs. Allison had been brought up in Paris — arrived, Letty had a start of pleasure. "To

meet a few friends of mine"—that meant, of course, one of *the* parties. She supposed it was Lord Fontenoy's doing. He was said to ask whom he would to Castle Luton. Under the influence of this idea, at any rate, she bore herself towards her husband's chief at their next meeting with an effusion which made Fontenoy supremely uncomfortable.

The week before Whitsuntide happened to be one of special annoyance for Tressady. His reports from Ferth were steadily more discouraging; his attempts to sell his land made no way; and he saw plainly that, if he was to keep their London life going, to provide for Shapetsky's claims, and to give Letty what she wanted for renovations at Ferth, he would have to sell some of the very small list of good securities left him by his father. Most young men in his place, perhaps, would have taken such a thing with indifference; he brooded over it. "I am beginning to spend my capital as income," he said to himself. "The strike will be on in July; next half-year I shall get almost nothing from the pits; rents won't come to much; Letty wants all kinds of things. How long will it be before I, too, am in debt, like my mother, borrowing from this person and that?"

Then he would make stern resolutions of economy, only to be baffled by Letty's determination to have everything that other people had; above all, not to allow her own life to be stinted because he had so foolishly adopted his mother's debts. She said little; or said it with smiles and a bridal standing on her rights not to be answered. But her persistence in a particular kind of claim, and her new refusal to be taken

into his confidence and made the partner of his anxieties, raised a miserable feeling in his mind as the weeks went on.

"No!" she said to herself, all the time resenting bitterly what had happened at Ferth; "if I let him talk to me about it, I shall be giving in, and letting *her* trample on me! If George will be so weak, he must find the money somehow. Of course he can! I am not in the *least* extravagant. I am only doing what everybody expects me to do."

Meanwhile this state of things did not make Lady Tressady any more welcome in Brook Street, and there were symptoms of grievances and quarrels of another sort. Lady Tressady heard that the young couple had already given one or two tiny dinner-parties, and to none of them had she been invited. One day that George had been obliged to go to Warwick Square to consult her on business, he was suddenly overwhelmed with reproaches on this point.

"I suppose Letty thinks I should spoil her parties! She is ashamed of me, perhaps" — Lady Tressady gave an angry laugh. "Oh! very well; but I should like you and her to understand, George, that I have been a good deal more admired in my time than ever Letty need expect to be!"

And George's mother, in a surprising yellow tea-gown, threw herself back on her chair, bridling with wrath and emotion. George declared, with good temper, that he and Letty were well aware of his mother's triumphs; whereupon Lady Tressady, becoming tearful, said she knew it wasn't a pretty thing to say — of course it wasn't — but if one was treated unkindly

by one's only son and his wife, what could one do but assert oneself?

George soothed her as best he could, and on his return home said tentatively to Letty, that he believed it would please his mother if they were to ask her to a small impromptu dinner of Parliamentary friends which they were planning for the following Friday.

"George!" exclaimed Letty, her eyes gleaming, "we can't ask her! I don't want to say anything disagreeable, but you must see that people don't like her — her dress is so *extraordinary*, and her manners — it sets people against the house. I do think it's too bad that —"

She turned aside with a sudden sob. George kissed her, and sympathised with her; for he himself was never at ease now for an instant while his mother was in the room. But the widening of the breach which Letty's refusal brought about only made his own position between the two women the more disagreeable to a man whose ideal of a home was that it should be a place of perpetual soothing and amusement.

On the very morning of their departure for Castle Luton matters reached a small crisis. Letty, tired with some festivity of the night before, took her breakfast in bed; and George, going upstairs toward the middle of the morning to make some arrangement with her for the journey, found her just come down, and walking up and down the drawing-room, her pale pink dress sweeping the floor, her hands clasped behind her. She was very pale, and her small lips were tightly drawn.

He looked at her with astonishment.

"What is the matter, darling?"

"Oh! nothing," said Letty, trying to speak with sarcasm. "Nothing at all. I have only just been listening to an account of the way in which your mother speaks of me to her friends. I ought to be flattered, of course, that she notices me at all! But I think I shall have to ask you to *request* her to put off her visit to Ferth a little. It could hardly give either of us much enjoyment."

George first pulled his moustaches, then tried, as usual, to banter or kiss her into composure. Above all, he desired not to know what Lady Tressady had said. But Letty was determined he should know. "She was heard" — she began passionately, holding him at arm's length — "she was heard saying to a *whole roomful* of people yesterday, that I was 'pretty, of course — rather pretty — but *so* second rate — and so provincial! It was such a pity dear George had not waited till he had been a few months in London. Still, of course, one could only make the best of it!'"

Letty mimicked her mother-in-law's drawling voice, two red spots burning on either cheek the while, and her little fingers gripping George's arm.

"I don't believe she ever said such things. Who told you so?" said George, stiffening, his arm dropping from her waist.

Letty tossed her head.

"Never mind! I *ought* to know, and it doesn't really matter how I know. She *did* say them."

"Yes, it does matter," said George, quickly, walking away to the other side of the room. "Letty! if

you would only send away that woman Grier, you can't think how much happier we should both be."

Letty stood still, opening her blue eyes wide.

"You want me — to get rid — of Grier," she said, "my own particular pet maid? And why — please?"

George had the courage to stick to his point, and the result was a heated and angry scene — their first real quarrel — which ended in Letty's rushing upstairs in tears, and declaring she would go *no*where. *He* might go to Castle Luton, if he pleased; she was far too agitated and exhausted to face a houseful of strangers.

The inevitable reconciliation, with its usual accompaniments of headache and eau de cologne, took time, and they only just completed their preparations and caught their appointed train.

Meanwhile the storm of the day had taken all savour from Letty's expectations, and made George feel the whole business an effort and a weariness. Letty sat pale and silent in her corner, devoured with regrets that she had not put on a thicker veil to hide the ravages of the morning; while George turned over the pages of a political biography, and could not prevent his mind from falling back again and again into dark places of dread and depression.

"You are my earliest guests," said Mrs. Allison, as she placed a chair for Letty beside herself, on the lawn at Castle Luton. "Except, indeed, that Lady Maxwell and her little boy are here somewhere, roaming about. But none of our other friends could get

down till later. I am glad we shall have a little quiet time before they come."

"Lady Maxwell!" said Letty. "I had no idea they were coming. Oh, what a lovely day! and how beautiful it all is!" she cried, as she sat down and looked round her. The colour came back into her cheeks She forgot her determination to keep her veil down, and raised it eagerly.

Mrs. Allison smiled.

"We never look so well as in May — the river is so full, and the swans are so white. Ah! I see Edgar has already taken Sir George to make friends with them."

And Letty, looking across the broad green lawn, saw the flash of a brimming river and a cluster of white swans, beside which stood her husband and a young man in a serge suit, who was feeding the swans with bread — Lord Ancoats, no doubt, the happy owner of all this splendour. To the left of their figures rose a stone bridge with a high, carved parapet, and beyond the river she saw green hills and woods against a radiant sky. Then, to her right was this wonderful yellowish pile of the old house. She began to admire and exclaim about it with a great energy and effusion, trying hard to say the correct and cultivated thing, and, in fact, repeating with a good deal of exactness what she had heard said of it by others.

Her hostess listened to her praises with a gentle smile. Gentleness, indeed, a rather sad gentleness, was the characteristic of Mrs. Allison. It seemed to make an atmosphere about her — her delicate blanched head and soft face, her small figure, her plain black

dress, her hands in their white ruffles. Her friends called it saintliness. At any rate, it set her apart, giving her a peculiar ethereal dignity which made her formidable in society to many persons who were not liable to shyness. Letty from the beginning had felt her formidable.

Yet nothing could be kinder or simpler than her manner. In response to Letty's enthusiasms she let herself be drawn at once into speaking of her own love for the house, and on to pointing out its features.

"I am always telling these things to newcomers," she said, smiling. "And I am not clever enough to make variations. But I don't mind, somehow, how often I go through it. You see, this front is Tudor, and the south front is a hundred years later, and both of them, they say, are the finest of their kind. Isn't it wonderful that two men, a hundred years apart, should each have left such a noble thing behind him. One inspired the other. And then we — we poor moderns come after, and must cherish what they left us as we best can. It's a great responsibility, don't you think? to live in a beautiful house."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about it," said Letty, laughing; "we live in such a very ugly one."

Mrs. Allison looked sympathetic.

"Oh! but then, ugly ones have character; or they are pretty inside, or the people one loves have lived in them. That would make any place a House Beautiful. Aren't you near Ferth?"

"Yes; and I am afraid you'll think me *dreadfully* discontented," said Letty, with one of her little laugh-

ing airs; "but there really isn't anything to make up in our barrack of a place. It's like a blackened brick set up on end at the top of a hill. And then the villages are so hideous."

"Ah! I know that coal-country," said Mrs. Allison, gravely — "and I know the people. Have you made friends with them yet?"

"We were only there for our honeymoon. George says that next month the whole place will be out on strike. So just now they hate us — they will hardly look at us in the street. But, of course, we shall give away things at Christmas."

Mrs. Allison's lip twitched, and she shot a glance at the bride which betrayed, for all her gentleness, the woman of a large world and much converse with mankind. What a curious, hard little face was Lady Tressady's under the outer softness of line and hue, and what an amazing costume! Mrs. Allison had no quarrel with beautiful gowns, but the elaboration, or, as one might say, the research of Letty's dress struck her unpleasantly. The time that it must have taken to think out!

Aloud she said:

"Ah! the strike. Yes, I fear it is inevitable. Ancoats has some property not very far from you, and we get reports. Poor fellows! if it weren't for the wretched agitators who mislead them — but there, we mustn't talk of these things. I see Lady Maxwell coming."

And Mrs. Allison waved her hand to a tall figure in white with a child beside it that had just emerged on the far distance of the lawn.

"Is Lord Maxwell here, too?" asked Letty.

"He is coming later. It seems strange, perhaps, that you should find them here this Sunday, for Lord Fontenoy comes to-morrow, and the great fight will be on so soon. But when I found that they were free, and that Maxwell would like to come, I was only too glad. After all, rival politicians in England can still meet each other, even at a crisis. Besides, Maxwell is a relation of ours, and he was my boy's guardian — the kindest possible guardian. Politics apart, I have the greatest respect for him. And her too. Why is it always the best people in the world that do the most mischief?"

At the mention of Lord Fontenoy it had been Letty's turn to throw a quick side look at Mrs. Allison. But the name was spoken in the quietest and most natural way; and yet, if one analysed the tone, in a way that did imply something exceptional, which, however, all the world knew, or might know.

"Is Lady Maxwell an old friend of yours, too?" asked Letty, longing to pursue the subject, and vexed to see how fast the mother and child were approaching.

"Only since her marriage. To see her and Maxwell together is really a poem. If only she wouldn't identify herself so hotly, dear woman! with everything he does and wishes in politics. There is no getting her to hear a word of reason. She is another Maxwell in petticoats. And it always seems to me so unfair. Maxwell without beauty and without petticoats is quite enough to fight! Look at that little fellow with his flowers! — such an oddity of a child!"

Then she raised her voice.

"My dear, what a ramble you must have made. Come and have a shady chair and some tea."

For answer Marcella, laughing, held up a glorious bunch of cuckoo-pint and marsh marigold, while little Hallin at her skirts waved another trophy of almost equal size. The mother's dark face was flushed with exercise and pleasure. As she moved over the grass, the long folds of a white dress falling about her, the flowers in her hand, the child beside her, she made a vision of beauty lovely in itself and lovely in all that it suggested. Frank joy and strength, happiness, purity of heart — these entered with her. One could almost see their dim heavenly shapes in the air about her.

Neither Letty nor Mrs. Allison could take their eyes from her. Perhaps she knew it. But if she did, it made no difference to her perfect ease of bearing. She greeted Letty kindly.

"You didn't expect to see me here, did you, Lady Tressady? But it is the unexpected that happens."

Then she put her hand on Mrs. Allison's shoulder, bending her height to her small hostess.

"What a day, and what a place! Hallin and I have been over hill and dale. But he is getting such a botanist, the little monkey! He will hardly forgive me because I forgot one of the flowers we found out yesterday in his botany book."

"She said it was 'Robin-run-in-the-'edge,' and it isn't — it's 'edge mustard," said Hallin, severely, holding up a little feathery stalk.

Mrs. Allison shook her head, endeavouring to suit her look to the gravity of the offence.

"Mother must learn her lessons better, mustn't she? Go and shake hands, little man, with Lady Tressady."

Hallin went gravely to do as he was told. Then he stood on one foot, and looked Letty over with a considering eye.

"Are you going to a party?" he said suddenly, putting out a small and grimy finger, and pointing to her dress.

"Hallin! come here and have your tea," said his mother, hastily. Then she turned to Letty with the smile that had so often won Maxwell a friend.

"I am sorry to say that he has a rooted objection to anything that isn't rags in the way of clothes. He entirely declined to take me across the river till I had rolled up my lace cloak and put it in a bush. And he won't really be friends with me again till we have both got back to the scarecrow garments we wear at home."

"Oh! children are so much happier when they are dirty," said Letty, graciously, pleased to feel herself on these easy terms with her two companions. "What beautiful flowers he has! and what an astonishing little botanist he seems to be!"

And she seated herself beside Hallin, using all her blandishments to make friends with him, which, however, did not prove to be an easy matter. For when she praised his flowers, Hallin only said, with his mouth full: "Oh! but mammy's bunch is *hever* so much bigger;" and when she offered him cake, the child would sturdily put the cake away, and hold it and her at arm's length till his mute look across the table had won his mother's nod of permission.

Letty at last thought him an odd, ill-mannered child, and gave up courting him, greatly to Hallin's satisfaction. He edged closer and closer to his mother, established himself finally in her pocket, and browsed on all the good things with which Mrs. Allison provided him, undisturbed.

"How late they are!" said Marcella, looking at her watch. "Tell me the names again, dear lady" — she bent forward, and laid her hand affectionately on Mrs. Allison's knee. "Your parties are always a work of art."

Mrs. Allison flushed a little, as though she liked the compliment, and ran laughingly through the names.

"Lord and Lady Maxwell."

"Ah!" said Marcella, "the least said about them the soonest mended. Go on."

"Lord and Lady Cathedine."

Marcella made a face.

"Poor little thing! I always think of the remark about the Queen in 'Alice in Wonderland.' 'A little kindness, and putting her hair in curl-papers, would do wonders for her.' She is so limp and thin and melancholy. As for him — isn't there a race or a prize-fight we can send him to?"

Mrs. Allison tapped her lightly on the lips.

"I won't go on unless my guests are taken prettily."

Marcella kissed the delicate wrinkled hand.

"I'll be good. What do you keep such an air here for? It gets into one's head."

Letty Tressady, indeed, was looking on with a feeling of astonishment. These merry, childlike airs had absolutely no place in her conception of Lady Max-

well. Nor could she know that Mrs. Allison was one of the very few people in the world to whom Marcella was ever drawn to show them.

"Sir Philip Wentworth," pursued Mrs. Allison, smiling. "Say anything malicious about him, if you can!"

"Don't provoke me. What a mercy I brought a volume of 'Indian Studies' in my bag! I will go up early, before dinner, and finish them."

"Then there is Madeleine Penley, and Elizabeth Kent."

A quick involuntary expression crossed Marcella's face. Then she drew herself up with dignity, and crossed her hands primly on her lap.

"Let me understand. Are you going to protect me from Lady Kent this time? Because, last time you threw me to the wolves in the most dastardly way."

Mrs. Allison laughed out.

"On the contrary, we all enjoyed your skirmish with her in November so much, we shall do our best to provoke another in May."

Marcella shook her head.

"I haven't the energy to quarrel with a fly. And as for Aldous — please warn his lady at dinner that he may go to sleep upon her shoulder!"

"You poor thing!" — Mrs. Allison put out a sympathetic hand. "Are you so tired? Why will you turn the world upside down?"

Marcella took the hand lightly in both hers.

"Why will you fight reform?"

And the eyes of the two women met, not without a

sudden grave passion. Then Marcella dropped the hand, and said, smiling:

"Castle Luton isn't full yet. Who else?"

"Oh! some young folk — Charlie Naseby."

"A nice boy — a very nice boy — not half such a coxcomb as he looks. Then the Levens — I know the Levens are coming, for Betty told me that she got out of two other engagements as soon as you asked her."

"Oh! and, by the way, Mr. Watton — Harding Watton," said Mrs. Allison, turning slightly towards Lady Tressady.

The exclamation on Lady Maxwell's lips was checked by something she saw on her hostess's face, and Letty eagerly struck in:

"Harding coming? — my cousin? I am so glad. I suppose I oughtn't to say it, but he is such a *clever*, such an *agreeable*, creature. But you know the Wattons, don't you, Lady Maxwell?"

Marcella was busying herself with Hallin's tea.

"I know Edward Watton," she said, turning her beautiful clear look on Letty. "He is a real friend of mine."

"Oh! but Harding is *much* the cleverer," said Letty. And pleased both to find the ball of talk in her hands, and to have the chance of glorifying a relation in this world of people so much bigger than herself, she plunged into an extravagant account — all adjectives and superlatives — of Harding Watton's charms and abilities, to which Lady Maxwell listened in silence.

"Tactless!" thought Mrs. Allison, with vexation, but she did not know how to stop the stream. In

truth, since she had given Lord Fontenoy leave to invite Harding Watton she had had time to forget the invitation, and she was sorry now to think of his housing with the Maxwells. For Watton had been recently Lord Fontenoy's henchman and agent in a newspaper attack upon the Bill, and upon Maxwell personally, that even Mrs. Allison had thought violent and unfair. Well, it was not her fault. But Lady Tressady ought to have better information and better sense than to be chattering like this. She was just about to interpose, when Marcella held up her hand.

"I hear the carriages!"

The hostess hastened towards the house, and Marcella followed her, with Hallin at her skirts. Letty looked after Lady Maxwell with the same mixture of admiration and jealous envy she had felt several times before. "I don't feel that I shall get on with her," she said to herself, impatiently. "But I don't think I want to. George took her measure at once."

Part of this reflection, however, was not true. Letty's ambition would have been very glad to "get on" with Marcella Maxwell.

Just as his wife was ready for dinner, and Grier had disappeared, George entered Letty's room. She was standing before a tall glass, putting the last touches to her dress — smoothing here, pinning there, turning to this side and to that. George, unseen himself, stood and watched her — her alternate looks of anxiety and satisfaction, her grace, the shimmering folds of the magnificent wedding-dress in which she had adorned herself.

He, however, was neither happy nor gay. But he had come in feeling that he must make an effort — many efforts, if their young married life was to be brought back to that level of ease and pleasure which he had once taken for granted, and which now seemed so hard to maintain. If that ease and pleasure were ultimately to fail him, what should he do? He shrank impatiently from the idea. Then he would scoff at himself. How often had he read and heard that the first year of marriage is the most difficult. Of course it must be so. Two individualities cannot fuse without turmoil, without heat. Let him only make his effort.

So he walked up to her and caught her in his arms.

"Oh, George! — my hair! — and my flowers!"

"Never mind," he said, almost with roughness. "Put your head there. Say you hate the thought of our day, as I do! Say there shall never be one like it again! Promise me!"

She felt the beating of his heart beneath her cheek. But she stood silent. His appeal, his unwonted agitation, revived in her all the anger and irritation that had begun to prey upon her thoughts. It was all very well, but why were they so pinched and uncomfortable? Why must everybody — Mrs. Allison, Lady Maxwell, a hundred others — have more wealth, more scope, more consideration than she? It was partly his fault.

So she gradually drew herself away, pushing him softly with her small gloved hand.

"I am sure I hate quarrelling," she said. "But there! Oh, George! don't let's talk of it any more!

And look what you have done to my poor hair. You dear, naughty boy!"

But though she called him "Dear," she frowned as she took off her gloves that she might mend what he had done.

George thrust his hands into his pockets, walked to the window, and waited. As he descended the great stairs in her wake he wished Castle Luton and its guests at the deuce. What pleasure was to be got out of grimacing and posing at these country-house parties? And now, according to Letty, the Maxwells were here. A great *gêne* for everybody!

CHAPTER XI

"That lady sitting by Sir George? What! Lady Maxwell? No — the other side? Oh! that's Lady Leven. Don't you know her? She's tremendous fun!"

And the dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked young man who was sitting beside Letty nodded and smiled across the table to Betty Leven, merely by way of reminding her of his existence. They had greeted before dinner — a greeting of comrades.

Then he turned back, with sudden decorum, to this Lady Tressady, whom he had been commissioned to take in to dinner. "Quite pretty, but rather — well, ordinary!" he said to himself, with a critical coolness bred of much familiarity with the best things of Vanity Fair. He had been Ancoats's friend at Cambridge, and was now disporting himself in the Guards, but still more — as Letty of course assumed — in the heart of the English well-born world. She knew that he was Lord Naseby, and that some day he would be a marquis. A halo, therefore, shone about him. At the same time, she had a long experience of young men, and, if she flattered him, it was only indirectly, by a sort of teasing aggression that did not allow him to take his attention from her.

"I declare you are better than any peerage!" she

said to him presently, when he had given her a short biography, first of Lord Cathedine, who was sitting opposite, then of various other members of the company. "I should like to tie you to my fan when I go out to dinner."

"Would you?" said the young man, drily. "Oh! you will soon know all you want to know."

"How are poor little people from Yorkshire to find their way about in this big world? You are all so dreadfully absorbed in each other. In the first place, you all marry each other."

"Do we?—though I don't quite understand who 'we' means. Well, one must marry somebody, I suppose, and cousins are less trouble than other people."

Involuntarily, the young man's eyes travelled along the table to a fair girl on the opposite side, dazzlingly dressed in black. She was wielding a large fan of black feathers, which threw both hair and complexion into amazing relief; and she seemed to be amusing herself in a nervous, spasmodic way with Sir Frank Leven. Letty noticed his glance.

"Oh! you have not earned your testimonial yet, not by any manner of means," she said. "That is Lady Madeleine Penley, isn't it? Is she a relation of Mrs. Allison's?"

"She is a cousin. That is her mother, Lady Kent, sitting beside poor Ancoats. Such an old character! By the end of dinner she will have got to the bottom of Ancoats, or know the reason why."

"Is Lord Ancoats such a mystery?" said Letty, running an inquisitive eye over the black front, sharp nose, and gorgeously bejewelled neck of a somewhat

noisy and forbidding old lady sitting on the right hand of the host.

Young Naseby's expression in answer rather piqued her. There was a quick flash of something that was instantly suppressed, and the youth said composedly,

"Oh! we are all mysteries for Lady Kent."

But Letty noticed that his eyes strayed back to Lord Ancoats, and then again to Lady Madeleine. He seemed to be observing them, and Letty's sharpness at once took the hint. No doubt the handsome, large-featured girl was here to be "looked at." Probably a good many maidens would be passed in review before this young Sultan made his choice! By the way he must be a good deal older than George had imagined. Clearly he left college some time ago. What a curious face he had — a small, crumpled face, with very prominent blue eyes; curly hair of a reddish colour, piled high, as though for effect, above his white brow; together with a sharp chin and pointed moustache, which gave him the air of an old French portrait. He was short in stature, but at the same time agile and strongly built. He wore one or two fine old rings, which drew attention to the delicacy of his hands; and his manner struck her as at once morose and excitable. Letty regarded him with involuntary respect as the son of Mrs. Allison — much more as the master of Castle Luton and fifty thousand a year. But if he had not been the master of Castle Luton she would have probably thought, and said, that he had a disagreeable Bohemian air.

"Haven't you really made acquaintance with Lady Kent?" said Lord Naseby, returning to the charge —

his laziness was somewhat at a loss for conversation. "I should have thought she was the person one could least escape knowing in the three kingdoms."

"I have seen her, of course," said Letty, lightly, though, alas! untruly. "But I am afraid you can hardly realise that I have only been three short seasons in London — two with an old aunt, who never goes out, in Cavendish Square, poor dull old dear! and another with Mrs. Watton, of Malford."

"Oh! with Mrs. Watton, of Malford," said Lord Naseby, vaguely. Then he became suddenly aware that Lady Leven, on the other side of the table, was beckoning to him. He leant across, and they exchanged a merry war of words about something of which Letty knew nothing.

Letty, rather incensed, thought him a puppy, drew herself up, and looked round at the ex-Governor beside her. She saw a fine head, the worn yellow face and whitened hair of a man who has suffered under a hot climate, and an agreeable, though somewhat courtly, smile. Sir Philip Wentworth was not troubled with the boyish fastidiousness of Lord Naseby. He perceived merely that a pretty young woman wished to make friends with him, and met her wish at once. Moreover, he identified her as the wife of that "promising and well-informed fellow, Tressady," with whom he had first made friends in India, and had now — just before dinner — renewed acquaintance in the most cordial fashion.

He talked graciously to the wife, then, of Tressady's abilities and Tressady's career. Letty at first liked it. Then she was seized with a curious sense of discomfort.

Her eyes wandered towards the head of the table, where George was talking — why! actually talking earnestly, and as though he were enjoying himself, to Lady Maxwell, whose noble head and neck, rising from a silver white dress, challenged a great Genoese Vandyck of a Marchesa Balbi which was hanging just behind her, and challenged it victoriously.

So other people thought and said these things of George? Letty was for a moment sharply conscious that they had not occupied much place in her mind since her marriage, or, for the matter of that, since her engagement. She had taken it for granted that he was "distinguished" — that was part of the bargain. Only, she never seemed as yet to have had either time or thought to give to those parts and elements in his life which led people to talk of him as this old Indian was doing.

Curtains, carpets, gowns, cabinets; additions to Ferth; her own effect in society; how to keep Lady Tressady in her place — of all these things she had thought, and thought much. But George's honourable ambitions, the esteem in which he was held, the place he was to make for himself in the world of men — in thinking of *these* her mind was all stiff and unpractised. She was conscious first of a moral prick, then of a certain irritation with other people.

Yet she could not help watching George wistfully. He looked tired and pale, in spite of the animation of his talk. Well! no doubt she looked pale too. Some of the words and phrases of their quarrel flashed across her. In this beautiful room, with its famous pictures and its historical associations, amid this

accumulated art and wealth, the whole thing was peculiarly odious to remember. Under the eyes of Vandyck's Marchesa one would have liked to think of oneself as always dignified and refined, always elegant and calm.

Then Letty had a revulsion, and laughed at herself.

"As if these people didn't have tempers, and quarrel about money! Of course they do! And if they don't — well, we all know how easy it is to be amiable on fifty thousand a year."

After dinner Mrs. Allison led the way to the "Green Drawing-room." This room, hung with Gainsborough portraits, was one of the sights of the house, and to-night Marcella Maxwell especially looked round her on entering it, with enchantment.

"You happy people!" she said to Mrs. Allison. "I never come into this room without anxiously asking myself whether I am fit to make one of the company. I look at my dress, or I am doubtful about my manners, or I wish someone had taught me to dance the minuet!"

"Yes," said Betty Leven, running up to a vast picture, a life-size family group, which covered the greater part of the farther wall of the room. "What a vulgar, insignificant chit one feels oneself without cap or powder! — without those ruffles, or those tippets, or those quilted petticoats! Mrs. Allison, *may* my maid come down to-morrow while we are at dinner and take the pattern of those ruffles? No — no! she sha'n't! Sacrilege! You pretty thing!" she said, addressing a figure — the figure of a girl in white

with thin virginal arms and bust, who seemed to be coming out of the picture, almost to be already out of it and in the room. "Come and talk to me. Don't think any more of your father and mother there. You have been curtsying to them for a hundred years; and they are rather dull, stupid people, after all. Come and tell us secrets. Tell us what you have seen in this room — all the foolish people making love, and the sad people saying good-bye."

Betty was kneeling on a carved chair, her pretty arms leaning on the back of it, her eyes fixed half in laughter, half in sentiment, on the figure in the picture.

Lady Maxwell suddenly moved closer to her, and Letty heard her say in a low voice, as she put her hand on Lady Leven's arm:

"Don't, Betty! *don't!* It was in this room he proposed to her, and it was in this room he said good-bye. Maxwell has often told me. I believe she never comes in here alone — only for ceremony and when there is a crowd."

A look of consternation crossed Lady Leven's lively little face. She glanced shyly towards Mrs. Allison. That lady had moved hastily away from the group in front of the picture. She was sitting by herself, looking straight before her, with a certain stiffness, her thin hands crossed on her knee. Betty impetuously went towards her, and was soon sitting on a stool beside her, chattering to her and amusing her.

Meanwhile Marcella invited Lady Tressady to come and sit with her on a sofa beneath the great picture.

Letty followed her, settled her satin skirts in their

most graceful folds, put one little foot on a Louis Quinze footstool which seemed to invite it, and then began to inform herself about the house and the family.

At the beginning of their talk it was clear that Lady Maxwell wished to ingratiate herself. A friendly observer would have thought that she was trying to make a stranger feel more at ease in this house and circle, where she herself was a familiar guest. Betty Leven, catching sight of the pair from the other side of the room, said to herself, with inward amusement, that Marcella was "realising the wife."

At any rate, for some time Lady Maxwell talked with sympathy, with effusion even, to her companion. In the first place she told her the story of their hostess.

Thirty years before, Mrs. Allison, the daughter and heiress of a Leicestershire squire, had married Henry Allison, old Lord Ancoats's second son, a young captain in the Guards. They enjoyed three years of life together; then the chances of a soldier's career, as interpreted by two high-minded people, took Henry Allison out to an obscure African coast, to fight one of the innumerable "little wars" of his country. He fell, struck by a spear, in a single-file march through some nameless swamp; and a few days afterwards the words of a Foreign Office telegram broke a pining woman's heart.

Old Lord Ancoats's death, which followed within a month or two, was hastened by the shock of his son's loss; and before the year was out the eldest son, who was sickly and unmarried, also died, and Mrs. Allison's

boy, a child of two, became the owner of Castle Luton. The mother saw herself called upon to fight down her grief, to relinquish the quasi-religious life she had entered upon, and instead to take her boy to the kingdom he was to rule, and bring him up there.

"And for twenty-two years she has lived a wonderful life here," said Marcella; "she has been practically the queen of a whole countryside, doing whatever she pleased, the mother and friend and saint of everybody. It has been all very paternal and beautiful, and — abominably Tory and tyrannous! Many people, I suppose, think it perfect. Perhaps I don't. But then, I know very well I can't possibly disagree with her a tenth part as strongly as she disagrees with me."

"Oh! but she admires you so much," cried Letty, with effusion; "she thinks you mean so nobly!"

Marcella opened her eyes, involuntarily wondering a little what Lady Tressady might know about it.

"Oh! we don't hate each other," she said, rather drily, "in spite of politics. And my husband was Ancoats's guardian."

"Dear me!" said Letty. "I should think it wasn't easy to be guardian to fifty thousand a year."

Marcella did not answer — did not, indeed, hear. Her look had stolen across to Mrs. Allison — a sad, affectionate look, in no way meant for Lady Tressady. But Letty noticed it.

"I suppose she adores him," she said.

Marcella sighed.

"There was never anything like it. It frightens one to see."

"And that, of course, is why she won't marry Lord Fontenoy?"

Marcella started, and drew away from her companion.

"I don't know," she said stiffly; "and I am sure that no one ever dared to ask her."

"Oh! but of course it's what everyone says," said Letty, gay and unabashed. "That's what makes it so exciting to come here, when one knows Lord Fontenoy so very well."

Marcella met this remark with a discouraging silence.

Letty, however, was determined this time to make her impression. She plunged into a lively and often audacious gossip about every person in the room in turn, asking a number of intimate or impertinent questions, and yet very seldom waiting for Marcella's reply, so anxious was she to show off her own information and make her own comments. She let Marcella understand that she suspected a great deal, in the matter of that handsome Lady Madeleine. It was *immensely* interesting, of course; but wasn't Lord Ancoats a trifle wild?—she bent over and whispered in Marcella's ears; was it likely that he would settle himself so soon?—didn't one hear sad tales of his theatrical friends and the rest? And what could one expect! As if a young man in such a position was not certain to have his fling! And his mother would have to put up with it. After all, men quieted down at last. Look at Lord Cathedine!

And with an air of boundless knowledge she touched upon the incidents of Lord Cathedine's career, hashing

up, with skilful deductions of her own, all that Lord Naseby had said or hinted to her at dinner. Poor Lady Cathedine! didn't she look a walking skeleton, with her strange, melancholy face, and every bone showing? Well, who could wonder! And when one thought of their money difficulties, too!

Lady Tressady lifted her white shoulders in compassion.

By this time Marcella's black eyes were wandering insistently round the room, searching for means of escape. Betty, far away, noticed her air, and concluded that the "realisation" was making rapid, too rapid, progress. Presently, with a smiling shake of her little head, she left her own seat and went to her friend's assistance.

At the same moment Mrs. Allison, driven by her conscience as a hostess, got up for the purpose of introducing Lady Tressady to a lady in grey who had been sitting quiet, and, as Mrs. Allison feared, lonely, in a corner, looking over some photographs. Marcella, who had also risen, put out a hand to Betty, and the two moved away together.

They stopped on the threshold of a large window at the side of the room, which stood wide open to the night. Outside, beyond a broad flight of steps, stretched a formal Dutch garden. Its numberless small beds, forming stiff scrolls and circles on a ground of white gravel, lay in bright moonlight. Even the colours of the hyacinths and tulips with which they were planted could be seen, and the strong scent from them filled the still air. At the far end of this flat-patterned place

a group of tall cypress and ilex, black against the sky, struck a note of Italy and the South; while, through the yew hedges which closed in the little garden, broad archways pierced at intervals revealed far breadths of silvery English lawn and the distant gleam of the river.

"Well, my dear," said Betty, laughing, and slipping her arm through Marcella's as they stood in the opening of the window, "I see you have been doing your duty for once. Let me pat you on the back. All the more that I gather you are not exactly enchanted with Lady Tressady. You really should keep your face in order. From the other end of the room I know exactly what you think of the person you are talking to."

"Do you?" said Marcella, penitently. "I wish you didn't."

"Well you may wish it, for it doesn't help the political lady to get what she wants. However, I don't think that Lady Tressady has found out yet that you don't like her. She isn't thin-skinned. If you had looked like that when you were talking to me, I would have paid you out somehow. What is the matter with her?"

"Oh! I don't know," said Marcella, impatiently, raising her shoulders. "But she jarred. I pined to get away — I don't think I ever want to talk to her again."

"No," said Betty, ruminating; "I'll tell you what it is — she isn't a gentleman! Don't interrupt me! I mean exactly what I say — *she isn't a gentleman*. She would do and say all the things that a nice man squirms at. I always have the oddest fancy about that kind of person. I see them as they must be at

night — all the fine clothes gone — just a little black soul scrawled between the bedclothes!"

"*You* to call me censorious!" said Marcella, laughing, and pinching her friend's arm.

"My dear, as I have often before remarked to you, *I* am not a great lady, with a political campaign to fight. If you knew your business, you would make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness in the shape of Lady Tressadys. *I* may do what I please — I have only a husband to manage!" and Betty's light voice dropped into a sigh.

"Poor Betty!" said Marcella, patting her hand. "Is Frank as discontented as ever?"

"He told me yesterday he hated his existence, and thought he would try whether the Serpentine would drown him. I said I was agreeable, only he would never achieve it without me. I should have to 'tice away the police while he looked for the right spot. So he has promised to take me into partnership, and it's all right so far."

Then Betty fell to sighing in earnest.

"It's all very well 'chaffing,' but I am a miserable woman. Frank says I have ruined his life; that it's all my ambition; that he might have made a decent country gentleman if I hadn't sown the seed of every vice in him by driving him into politics. Pleasant, isn't it, for a model wife like me?"

"You'll have to let him give it up," said Marcella, smiling; "I don't believe he'll ever reconcile himself to the grind and the town life."

Betty clenched her small hands.

"My dear! I never promised to marry a sporting

boor, and I can't yet make up my mind to sink to it. Don't let's talk of it! I only hope he'll vote straight in the next few months. But the thought of being kept through August drives him desperate already. Ah! here they are — plagues of the human race! —" and she waved an accusing hand towards the incoming stream of gentlemen. "Now, I'll prophesy, and you watch. Lady Tressady will make two friends here — Harding Watton — oh! I forgot, he's her cousin! — and Lord Cathedine. Mark my words. By the way —" Betty caught Marcella's arm and spoke eagerly into her friend's ear. Her eyes meanwhile glanced over her shoulder towards Lady Madeleine and her mother, who were seated on the further side of the room.

Marcella's look followed Betty's, but she showed no readiness to answer Betty's questions. When Letty had made her astonishing remarks on the subject of Madeleine Penley, Lady Maxwell had tried to stop her with a hauteur which would have abashed most women, though it had but small effect on the bride. And now, even to Betty, who was Madeleine Penley's friend, Marcella was not communicative; although when Betty was carried off by Lord Naseby who came in search of her as soon as he entered the drawing-room, the elder woman stood for a moment by the window, watching the girl they had been talking of with a soft serious look.

But the softness passed. A slight incident disturbed it. For the spectator saw Lady Kent, who was sitting beside her daughter, raise a gigantic fan and beckon to Lord Ancoats. He came unwillingly,

and she made some bantering remark. Lady Madeleine meanwhile was bending over a book of photographs, with a flushed cheek and a look of constraint. Ancoats stood near her for a moment uneasily, frowning and pulling at his moustache. Then with an abrupt word to Lady Kent, he turned away and threw himself on a sofa beside Lord Cathedine. Lady Madeleine bent lower over her book, her beautiful hair making a spot of fire in the room. Marcella caught the expression of her profile, and her own face took a look of pain. She would have liked to go instantly to the girl's side, with some tenderness, some caress. But that gorgon Lady Kent, now looking extremely fierce, was in the way, and moreover other young men had arrived to take the place Ancoats had apparently refused.

Meanwhile Letty saw the arrival of the gentlemen with delight. She had found but small entertainment in the lady to whom Mrs. Allison had introduced her. Miss Paston, the sister of Lord Ancoats's agent, was a pleasant-looking spinster of thirty-five in a Quakerish dress of grey silk. Her face bore witness that she was capable and refined. But Letty felt no desire whatever to explore capability and refinement. She had not come to Castle Luton to make herself agreeable to Miss Paston.

So the conversation languished. Letty yawned a little, and flourished her fan a great deal, till the appearance of the men brought back the flush to her cheek and animation to her eye. She drew herself up at once, hungry for notice and success. Mrs.

Hawkins, the vicar's wife at Malford, would have been avenged could she have watched her old tyrant under these chastening circumstances.

Harding Watton crossed the room when he saw his cousin, and took the corner of the sofa beside her. Letty received him graciously, though she was perhaps disappointed that it was not Lord Ancoats or Lord Cathedine. Looking round before she gave herself to conversation with him, she saw that George was standing near the open window with Lord Maxwell and Sir Philip Wentworth, the ex-Governor. They were talking of India, and Sir Philip had his hand on George's arm.

"Yes, I saw Dalhousie go," he said eagerly. "I was only a lad of twenty, but I can't think of it now without a lump in my throat. When he limped on to the Hooghly landing-stage on his crutches we couldn't cheer him — I shall never forget that sudden silence! In eight years he had made a new India, and there we saw him, — our little hero, — dying of his work at forty-six before our eyes! . . . Well, I couldn't have imagined that a young man like you would have known or cared so much about that time. What a talk we have had! Thank you!"

And the veteran tightened his grip cordially for a moment on Tressady's arm, then dropped it and walked away.

Tressady threw his wife a bright glance, as though to ask her how she fared. Letty smiled graciously in reply, feeling a sudden softening pleasure in being so thought of. As her eyes met her husband's she saw Marcella Maxwell, who was still standing by the win-

dow, turn towards George and call to him. George moved forward with alacrity. Then he and Lady Maxwell slowly walked down the steps to the garden, and disappeared through one of the archways to the left.

"That great lady and George seem at last to have made friends," said Harding Watton to Letty, in a laughing undertone. "I have no doubt she is trying to win him over. Well she may! Before the next few weeks are over the Government will be in a fix with this Bill; and not even their 'beautiful lady' will help them out. Maxwell looks as glum as an owl to-night."

Letty laughed. The situation pleased her vanity a good deal. The thought of Lady Maxwell humiliated and defeated — partly by George's means — was decidedly agreeable to her. Which would seem to show that she was, after all, more sensitive or more quick-eyed than Betty Leven had been ready to allow.

Meanwhile Marcella and George Tressady were strolling slowly towards the river, along a path that crossed the great lawns. In front of them the stretches of grass, bathed in silvery light and air, ran into far distances of shade under majestic trees just thickening to a June wealth of foliage. Below, these distant tree-masses made sharp capes and promontories on the white grass; above, their rounded tops rose dark against a blue, light-breathing sky. At one point the river pierced the blackness of the wood, and in the space thus made the spire of a noble church shot heavenward. Swans floated dimly along the stream

and under the bridge. The air was fresh, but the rawness of spring was gone. It was the last week of May; the "high midsummer pomps" were near — a heavenly prophecy in wood and field.

And not even Tressady's prejudice — which, indeed, was already vanishing — could fail to see in the beautiful woman beside him the fitting voice and spirit of such a scene.

To-night he said to himself that one must needs believe her simple, in spite of report. During their companionship this evening she had shown him more and more plainly that she liked his society; her manner towards him, indeed, had by now a soft surrender and friendliness that no man could possibly have met with roughness, least of all a man young and ambitious. But at the same time he noticed again, as he had once noticed with anger, that she was curiously free from the usual feminine arts and wiles. After their long talk at dinner, indeed, he began, in spite of himself, to feel her not merely an intellectual comrade, — that he had been conscious of from the first, — but rather a most winning and attaching companion. It was a sentiment of friendly ease, that seemed to bring with it a great relief from tension. The sordid cares and frictions of the last few weeks, and the degrading memories of the day itself, alike ceased to wear him.

Yet all the time he said to himself, with inward amusement, that he must take care! They had not talked directly of the Bill at dinner, but they had talked round and about it incessantly. It was clear that the Maxwells were personally very anxious; and

George knew well that the public position of the Ministry was daily becoming more difficult. There had been a marked cooling on the subject of the Bill among their own supporters; one or two London members originally pledged to it were even believed to be wavering; and this campaign lately started by Fontenoy and Watton against two of the leading clauses of the measure, in a London "daily," bought for the purpose, had been so far extremely damaging. The situation was threatening indeed, and Maxwell might well look harassed.

Yet Tressady had detected no bitterness in Lady Maxwell's mood. Her temper rather seemed to him very strenuous, very eager, and a little sad. Altogether, he had been touched, he knew not exactly why, by his conversation with her. "We are going to win," he said to himself, "and she knows it." Yet to think thus gave him, for the first time, no particular pleasure.

As they strolled along they talked a little of some of the topics that had been started at dinner, topics semi-political and semi-social, till suddenly Lady Maxwell said, with a change of voice:

"I heard some of your conversation with Sir Philip just now. How differently you talk when you talk of India!"

"I wonder what that means," said George, smiling. "It means, at any rate, that when I am not talking of India, but of English labour, or the poor, you think I talk like a brute."

"I shouldn't put it like that," she said quietly. "But when you talk of India, and people like the

Lawrences or Lord Dalhousie, then it is that one sees what you really admire — what stirs you — what makes you feel."

"Well, ought I not to feel? Is there to be no gratitude towards the people that have made one's country?"

He looked down upon her gaily, perfectly conscious of his own tickled vanity. To be observed and analysed by such a critic was in itself flattery.

"That have made one's country?" she repeated, not without a touch of irony. Then suddenly she became silent.

George thrust his hands into his pockets and waited a little.

"Well?" he said presently. "Well? I am waiting to hear you prove that the Dalhousies and the Lawrences have done nothing for the country, compared to — what shall we say? — some trade-union secretary whom you particularly admire."

She laughed, but he did not immediately draw his answer. They had reached the river-bank and the steps of the little bridge. Marcella mounted the bridge and paused midway across it, hanging over the parapet. He followed her, and both stood gazing at the house. It rose from the grass like some fabric of yellowish ivory cut and scrolled and fretted by its Tudor architect, who had been also a goldsmith. There were lights like jewels in its latticed windows; the dark fulness of the trees, disposed by an artist-hand, enwrapped or fell away from it as the eye required; and on the dazzling lawns, crossed by soft bands of shadow, scattered forms moved up and

down — women in trailing dresses, and black-coated men. There were occasional sallies of talk and laughter, and from the open window of the drawing-room came the notes of a violin.

"Brahms!" said Marcella, with delight. "Nothing but music and he could express this night — or the river — or the rising glow and bloom of everything."

As she spoke George felt a quick gust of pleasure and romance sweep across him. It was as though senses that had been for long on the defensive, tired, or teased merely by the world, gave way in a moment to joy and poetry. He looked from the face beside him to the pictured scene in which they stood — the soft air filled his lungs — what ailed him? — he only knew that after many weeks he was, somehow, happy and buoyant again!

Lady Maxwell, however, soon forgot the music and the moonlight.

"That have made one's country?" she repeated, pausing on the words. "And of course that house appeals to you in the same way? Famous people have lived in it — people who belong to history. But for *me*, the real making of one's country is done out of sight, in garrets and workshops and coalpits, by people who die every minute — forgotten — swept into heaps like autumn leaves, their lives mere soil and foothold for the generation that comes after them. All yesterday morning, for instance, I spent trying to feed a woman I know. She is a shirtmaker; she has four children, and her husband is a docker out of work. She had sewed herself sick and blind. She couldn't eat, and she couldn't sleep. But she had

kept the children alive — and the man. Her life will flicker out in a month or two; but the children's lives will have taken root, and the man will be eating and earning again. What use would your Dalhousies and Lawrences be to England without her and the hundreds of thousands like her?"

"And yet it is you," cried George, unable to forbear the chance she gave him, "who would take away from this very woman the power of feeding her children and saving her husband — who would spoil all the lives in the clumsy attempt to mend one of them. How can you quote me such an instance! It amazes me."

"Not at all. I have only to use my instance for another purpose, in another way. You are thinking of the Bill, of course? But all we do is to say to some of these victims, 'Your sacrifice, as it stands, is *too* costly; the State in its own interest cannot go on exacting or allowing it. We will help you to serve the community in ways that shall exhaust and wound it less.'"

"And as a first step, drive you all comfortably into the workhouse!" said George. "Don't omit that."

"Many individuals must suffer," she said steadily. "But there will be friends to help — friends that will strain every nerve to help."

All her heart showed itself in voice and emphasis. Almost for the first time in their evening's talk her natural passionateness came to sight — the Southern, impulsive temper, that so often made people laugh at or dislike her. Under the lace shawl she had thrown round her on coming out he saw the quick rise and

fall of the breast, the nervous clasp of the hands lying on the stonework of the bridge. These were her prophetess airs again. To-night they still amused him, but in a gentler and more friendly way.

"And so, according to your own account, you will protect your tailoress and unmake your country. I am sorry for your dilemma," he said, laughing.

"Ah! well," — she shrugged her shoulders with a sigh, — "don't let's talk of it. It's all too pressing — and sore — and hot. And to think of the weeks that are just coming on!"

George, hanging over the parapet beside her, felt reply a little awkward, and said nothing. For a minute or two the night made itself heard, the gentle slipping of the river, the fitful breathings from the trees. A swan passed and repassed below them, and an owl called from the distant woods.

Presently Marcella lifted a white finger and pointed to the house.

"One wouldn't want a better parable," she said. "It's like the State as you see it — magnificent, inspiring, a thing of pomp and dignity. But we women, who have to drive and keep going a house like that — *we* know what it all rests upon. It rests upon a few tired kitchen-maids and boot-boys and scullery-girls, hurrying, panting creatures, whom a guest never sees, who really run it all. I know, for I have tried to unearth them, to organise them, to make sure that no one was fainting while we were feasting. But it is incredibly hard; half the human race believes itself born to make things easy for the other half. It comes natural to them to ache and toil

while we sit in easy chairs. What they resent is that we should try to change it."

"Goodness!" said George, pulling at his moustaches. "I don't recognise my own experience of the ordinary domestic polity in that summary."

"I daresay. You have to do with the upper servant, who is always a greater tyrant than his master," she retorted, her voice expressing a curious medley of laughter and feeling. "I am speaking of the people that are not seen, like the tailoress and shirtmaker, in your drum-and-trumpet State."

"Well, you may be right," said George, drily. "But I confess — if I may be quite frank — that I don't altogether trust you to judge. I want at least, before I strike the balance between my Dalhousie and your tailoress, to hear what those people have to say who have not crippled their minds — by pity!"

"Pity!" she said, her lip trembling in spite of herself. "Pity! — you count pity a disease?"

"As you — and others — practise it," he replied coolly, turning round upon her. "It is no good; the world can't be run by pity. At least, living always seems to me a great brutal, rushing, rough-and-tumble business, which has to be carried on whether we like it or no. To be too careful, too gingerly over the separate life, brings it all to a standstill. Meddle too much, and the Demiurge who set the machine going turns sulky and stops working. Then the nation goes to pieces — till some strong ruffian without a scruple puts it together again."

"What do you mean by the Demiurge?"

He laughed.

"Why do you make me explain my flights? Well, I suppose, the natural daimonic power in things, which keeps them going and set them off; which is not us, or like us, and cares nothing for us."

His light voice developed a sudden energy during his little speech.

"Ah!" said Marcella, wistfully. "Yes, if one thought that, I could understand. But, even so, if the power behind things cares nothing for us, I should only regard it as challenging us to care more for each other. Do you mind my asking you a few plain questions? Do you know anything personally of the London poor? I mean, have you any real friends among them, whose lives you know?"

"Well, I sit with Fontenoy while he receives deputations from all those tailoresses and shirtmakers and fur-sewers that *you* want to put in order. The harassed widow streams through his room perpetually — wailing to be let alone!"

Marcella made a sound of amused scorn.

"Oh! you think that nothing," said George, indignant. "I vow I could draw every type of widow that London contains — I know them intimately."

She shook her head.

"I give up London. Then, in the North, aren't you a coal-owner? Do you know your miners?"

"Yes, and I detest them!" said George, shortly; "pig-headed brutes! They will be on strike next month, and I shall be defrauded of my lawful income till their lordships choose to go back. Pity *me*, if you please — not them!"

"So I do," she said with spirit — "if you hate the men by whom you live!"

There was silence. Then suddenly George said, in another tone:

"But sometimes, I don't deny, the beggars wring it out of one — your pity. I saw a mother last week — Suppose we stroll on a little. I want to see how the river gets out of the wood."

They descended the bridge, and turned again into the river-path. George told the story of Mary Batchelor in his half-ironic way, yet so that here and there Marcella shivered. Then gradually, as though it were a relief to him to talk, he slipped into a half-humorous, half-serious discussion of his mine-owner's position and its difficulties. Incidentally and unconsciously a good deal of his history betrayed itself in his talk: his bringing-up, his mother; the various problems started in his mind since his return from India; even his relations to his wife. Once or twice it flashed across him that he was confessing himself with an extraordinary frankness to a woman he had made up his mind to dislike. But the reflection did not stop him. The balmy night, the solitude, this loveliness that walked beside him so willingly and kindly — with every step they struck his defences from him; they drew; they penetrated.

With her, too, everything was simple and natural. She had felt his attraction at their first meeting; she had determined to make a friend of him; and she was succeeding. As he disclosed himself she felt a strange compassion for him. It was plain to her woman's instinct that he was at heart lonely and uncompanioned. Well, what wonder with that hard, mean little being for a wife! Had she captured him, or had he thrown

himself away upon her in mere wantonness, out of that defiance of sentiment which appeared to be his favourite *parti-pris?* In any case, it seemed to this happy wife that he had done the one fatal and irreparable thing; and she was genuinely sorry for him. She felt him very young, too. As far as she could gather, he was about two years her junior; but her feeling made the gap much greater.

Yet, of course, the situation,—Maxwell, Fontenoy,—all that those names implied to him and her, made a thrilling under-note in both their minds. She never forgot her husband and his straits; and in George's mind Fontenoy's rugged figure stood sentinel. Given the circumstances, both her temperament and her affections drove her inevitably into trying, first to attract, then to move and influence her companion. And given the circumstances, he could but yield himself bit by bit to her woman's charm; while full all the time of a confident scorn for her politics.

Insensibly, the stress upon them drew them back to London and to current affairs, and at last she said to him, with vehemence:

"You *must* see these people in the flesh—and not in your house, but in theirs. Or, first come and meet them in mine?"

"Why, please, should you think St. James's Square a palace of truth compared to Carlton House Terrace?" he asked her, with amusement. Fontenoy lived in Carlton House Terrace.

"I am not inviting you to St. James's Square," she said quietly. "That house is only my home for one

set of purposes. Just now my true home is not there at all. It is in the Mile End Road."

George asked to be informed, and opened his eyes at her account of the way in which she still divided her time between the West End and the East, spending always one or two nights a week among the trades and the work-people she had come to know so intimately, whose cause she was fighting with such persistence.

"Maxwell doesn't come now," she said. "He is too busy, and his work there is done. But I go because I love the people, and to talk with them and live with them part of every week keeps one's mind clear as to what one wants, and why. Well," — her voice showed that she smiled, — "will you come? My old maid shall give you coffee, and you shall meet a roomful of tailors and shirtmakers. You shall see what people look like in the flesh — not on paper — after working fourteen hours at a stretch, in a room where you and I could not breathe!"

"Charming!" — he bowed ironically. "Of course I will come."

They had paused under the shadow of a grove of beech-trees, and were looking back towards the moonlit garden and the house. Suddenly George said, in an odd voice:

"Do you mind my saying it? You know, nobody is ever converted — politically — nowadays."

In the darkness her flush could not be seen. But he felt the mingled pride and soreness in her voice, under its forced brightness.

"I know. How long is it since a speech turned a

vote in the House of Commons! One wonders why people take the trouble to speak. Shall we go back? Ah! there is someone pursuing us — my husband and Ancoats!"

And two figures, dark for an instant against the brightness of the lawns, plunged into the shadow of the wood.

"You wanderers!" said Maxwell, as he distinguished his wife's white dress. "Is this path quite safe in this darkness? Suppose we get out of it."

The river, indeed, beneath a steep bank, ran close beside them, and the trees meeting overhead all but shut out the moon. Maxwell, in some anxiety, caught his wife's arm, and made her pause till his eye should be once more certain of the path. Meanwhile Ancoats and Tressady walked quickly back to the lawn, Ancoats talking and laughing with unusual vigour.

The Maxwells did not hurry themselves. As they emerged from the wood Marcella slipped her hand into her husband's. It was her characteristic caress. The slim, strong hand loved to feel itself in the shelter of his; while to him that seeking touch was the symbol of all that she brought him — the inventive, inexhaustible arts of a passion which was a kind of genius.

"Don't go in!" she pleaded. "Why should we?"

"No! — why should we?" he repeated, sighing. "Why are we here at all? — that is what I have been asking myself all the evening. And now more than ever since my walk with that boy Ancoats."

"Tell me about it," she said eagerly. "Could you get nothing out of him?"

Maxwell shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing. He vows that everything is all right; that he knows a pack of slanderers have been 'yelping at him,' and he wishes both they and his mother would let him alone."

"His mother!" cried Marcella, outraged.

"Well, I suppose I said to him the kind of thing you would evidently like to say. But with no result. He merely laughed, and chattered about everything under the sun — his race-horses, new plays, politics — Heaven knows what! He is in an excited state — feverish, restless, and, I should think, unhappy. But he would tell nothing — to me."

"How much do you think she knows?"

"His mother? Nothing, I should say. Every now and then I detect a note of extra anxiety when she talks to him; and there is evidently something in her mind, some impression from his manner, perhaps, which is driving her more keenly than ever towards this marriage. But I don't believe a single one of the stories that have reached us has reached her. And now — here is this poor girl — and even my dull eyes have noticed that to-night he has purposely, markedly, avoided her."

Marcella felt her cheek flame.

"And when one thinks of his behaviour in the winter!" she cried.

They wandered on along a path that skirted the wood, talking anxiously about the matter which had in truth brought them to Castle Luton. In spite of the com-

parative gentleness of English political relations, neither Maxwell nor Marcella, perhaps, would willingly have become Charlotte Allison's guests at a moment when her house was actually the headquarters of a violent and effective opposition to Maxwell's policy, when moreover the leader of that opposition was likely to be of the party. But about a fortnight before Whitsuntide some tales of young Ancoats had suddenly reached Maxwell's ears, with such effect that on his next meeting with Ancoats's mother he practically invited himself and Marcella — greatly to Mrs. Allison's surprise — to Castle Luton for Whitsuntide.

For the boy had been Maxwell's ward, and Henry Allison had been the intimate friend and comrade of Maxwell's father. And Maxwell's feeling for his father, and for his father's friends, was of such a kind that his guardian's duties had gone deep with him. He had done his best for the boy, and since Ancoats had reached his majority his ex-guardian had still kept him anxiously in mind.

Of late indeed Ancoats had troubled himself very little about his guardian, or his guardian's anxieties. He seemed to have been devoting a large share of his mind to the avoidance of his mother's old friends; and the Maxwells, for months, in spite of many efforts on their part, had seen little or nothing of him. Maxwell for various reasons had begun to suspect a number of uncomfortable things with regard to the young fellow's friends and pleasures. Yet nothing could be taken hold of till this sudden emergence of a particular group of stories, coupling Ancoats's name with that of a notorious little actress

whose adventures had already provided a certain class of newspaper with abundant copy.

Then Maxwell, who cared personally very little for the red-haired youth himself, took alarm for the mother's sake. For in the case of Mrs. Allison a scandal of the kind suggested meant a tragedy. Her passion for her son was almost a tragedy already, so closely mingled in it were the feelings of the mother and those of the Christian, to whom "vice" is not an amusement, but an agony.

Yet, as Marcella said and felt, it was a hard fate that had forced Maxwell to concern himself with Ancoats's love-affairs at this particular moment.

"Don't think of it," she said at last, urgently, as they walked along. "It is too bad; as if there were not enough!"

Maxwell stood still, with a little smile, and put his arm round her shoulders.

"Dear, I shall soon have time enough, probably, to think about Ancoats's affairs or anything else. Do you know that I was planning this morning what we would do when we go out? Shall we slip over to the Australian colonies in the autumn? I would give a good deal to see them for myself."

She gave a low cry of pain.

"Why are you so depressed to-night? Is there any fresh news?"

"Yes. And, altogether, things look increasingly bad for us, and increasingly well for them. It will be extraordinarily close anyway — probably a matter of a vote or two."

And he gave her a summary of his after-dinner conversation with Lord Cathedine, a keen ally of Fontenoy's in the Lords, and none the less a shrewd fellow because he happened to be also a detestable person.

Marcella heard the news of one or two fresh defections from the Government with amazement and indignation. She stood there in the darkness, leaning against the man she loved, her heart beating fast and stormily. How could the world thus misconceive and thwart him? And what could she do? Her mind ran passionately through a hundred schemes, refusing to submit — to see him baffled and defeated.

CHAPTER XII

To Lord Ancoats himself this party of his mother's was an oppression and a nuisance. He had only been induced to preside over it with difficulty; and his mother had been both hurt and puzzled by his reluctance to play the host.

If you had asked Maxwell's opinion on the point, he would have told you that Ancoats's bringing up had a good deal to do with the present anxieties of Ancoats's mother. He — Maxwell — had done his best, but he had been overmatched.

First and foremost, Ancoats had been to no public school. It was not the custom of the family; and Mrs. Allison could not be induced to break the tradition. There was accordingly a succession of tutors, whose Church-principles at least were sound. And Ancoats showed himself for a time an impressionable, mystical boy, entirely in sympathy with his mother. His confirmation was a great family emotion, and when he was seventeen Mrs. Allison had difficulty in making him take food enough in Lent to keep him in health. Maxwell was beginning to wonder where it would end, when the lad was sent to Cambridge, and the transformation scene that might always perhaps have been expected, began.

He had been two years at Trinity when he went to

pay the Maxwells a visit at the Court. Maxwell could hardly believe his eyes or ears. The boy who at nineteen was an authority on church music and ancient "uses," by twenty-one talked and thought of nothing in heaven or earth but the stage and French *bric-à-brac*. His conversation swarmed with the names of actors, singers, and dancers; but they were names that meant nothing except to the initiated. They were the small people of the small theatres; and Ancoats was a Triton among them, not at all, so he carefully informed his kindred, because of his wealth and title, but because he too was an artist, and could sing, revel, write, and dance with the best of them.

For some time Maxwell was able to console Mrs. Allison with the historical reflection that more than one son of the Oxford Movement had found in a passion for the stage a ready means of annoying the English Puritan. When it came, however, to the young man's producing risky plays of his own composing at extremely costly *matinées*, there was nothing for it but to interfere. Maxwell at last persuaded him to give up the farce of Cambridge and go abroad. But Ancoats would only go with a man of his own sort; and their time was mostly spent in Paris, where Ancoats divided his hard-spent existence between the furious pursuit of Louis Quinze *bibelots* and the patronage of two or three minor theatres. To be the king of a first night, raining applause and bouquets from his stage-box, seemed to give him infinite content; but his vanity was hardly less flattered by the compliments say of M. Tournonville, the well-known dealer on the Quai Voltaire, who would bow himself before

the young Englishman with the admiring cry, "Mon Dieu! milord, que vous êtes fin connoisseur!" while the dealer's assistant grinned among the shadows of the back-shop.

At last, at twenty-four, he must needs return to England for his coming of age under his grandfather's will and the taking over of his estate. Under the sobering influence of these events, his class and his mother seemed for a time to recover him. He refurnished a certain number of rooms at Castle Luton, and made a special marvel of his own room, which was hung thick with Boucher, Greuze, and Watteau engravings, littered with miniatures and trinkets, and encumbered here and there with portfolios of drawings which he was not anxious to unlock in his mother's presence.

Moreover, he was again affectionate to his mother, and occasionally even went to church with her. The instincts of the English aristocrat reappeared amid the accomplishments of the *petit-maître*, and poor Mrs. Allison's spirits revived. Then the golden-haired Lady Madeleine was asked to stay at Castle Luton. When she came Ancoats devoted himself with extraordinary docility. He drew her, made songs for her, and devised French charades to act with her; he even went so far as to compare her with enthusiasm to the latest and most wonderful "Salome" just exhibited in the Salon by the latest and most wonderful of the impressionists. But Lady Madeleine fortunately had not seen the picture.

Then suddenly, one morning, Ancoats went up to town without notice and remained there. After a while his mother pursued him thither; but Ancoats

was restless at sight of her, and she was not long in London, though long enough to show the Maxwells and others that her heart was anxiously set upon Lady Madeleine as a daughter-in-law.

This then — taken together with the stories now besprinkling the newspapers — was the situation. Naturally, Ancoats's affairs, as he himself was irritably aware, were now, in one way or another, occupying the secret thoughts or the private conversations of most of his mother's guests.

For instance —

"Are you nice?" said Betty Leven, suddenly, to young Lord Naseby, in the middle of Sunday morning. "Are you in a charitable, charming, humble, and trusting frame of mind? Because, if not, I shall go away — I have had too much of Lady Kent!"

Charlie Naseby laughed. He was sitting reading in the shade at the edge of one of the Castle Luton lawns. For some time past he had been watching Betty Leven and Lady Kent, as they talked under a cedar-tree some little distance from him. Lady Kent conversed with her whole bellicose person — her cap, her chin, her nose, her spreading and impressive shoulders. And from her gestures young Naseby guessed that she had been talking to Betty Leven rather more in character than usual.

He felt a certain curiosity about the *tête-à-tête*. So that when Betty left her companion and came tripping over the lawn to the house, the young man lifted his face and gave her a smiling nod, as though to invite her to come and visit him on the way. Betty came,

and then as she stood in front of him delivered the home question already reported.

"Am I nice?" repeated young Naseby. "Far from it. I have not been to church, and I have been reading a French novel of which I do not even propose to tell you the name."

And he promptly slipped his volume into his pocket.

"Which is worst?" said Betty, pensively: "to break the fourth Commandment or the ninth? Lady Kent, of course, has been trampling on them both. But the ninth is her particular victim. She calls it 'getting to the roots of things.'"

"Whose roots has she been delving at this morning?" said Naseby.

Betty looked behind her, saw that Lady Kent had gone into the house, and let herself drop into the corner of Naseby's bench with a sigh of fatigue.

"One feels as though one were a sort of house-dog tussling with a burglar. I have been keeping her off all my friends' secrets by main force; so she had to fall back on George Tressady, and tell me ugly tales of his mamma."

"George Tressady! Why on earth should she do him an ill turn? I don't believe she ever saw him before."

Betty pressed her lips. She and Charlie Naseby had been friends since they wore round pinafores and sat on high nursery chairs side by side.

"One needn't go to the roots of things," she said, severely, "but one should have eyes in one's head. Has it ever occurred to you that Ancoats has taken a

special fancy to Sir George — that he sat talking to him last night till all hours, and that he has been walking about with him the whole of this morning, instead of walking about — well! with somebody else — as he was meant to do? Why do men behave in this ridiculous manner? Women, of course. But *men!* It's like a trout that won't let itself be landed. And what's the good? It's only prolonging the agony."

"Not at all," said Naseby, laughing. "There's always the chance of slipping the hook." Then his lively face became suddenly serious. "But it's time, I think," he added, almost with vehemence, "that Lady Kent stopped trying to land Ancoats. In the first place, it's no good. He won't be landed against his will. In the next — well, I only know," he broke off, "that if I had a sister in love with Ancoats at the present moment, I'd carry her off to the North Pole rather than let her be talked about with him!"

Betty opened her eyes.

"Then there *is* something in the stories!" she cried. "Of course, Frank told me there was nothing. And the Maxwells have not said a word. And *now* I understand why Lady Kent has been dinning it into my ears — I could only be thankful Mrs. Allison was safe at church — that Ancoats should marry early. 'Oh! my dear, it's always been the only hope for them!'" Betty mimicked Lady Kent's deep voice and important manner: "'Why, there was the grandfather — *his* wife had a time! — I could tell you things about *him!* — oh! and her too. — And even Henry Allison! —' There, of course, I stopped her."

"Old ghoul!" said Naseby, in disgust. "So she knows. And yet — good Heavens! where does that charming girl come from?"

He knocked the end off his cigarette, and returned it to his mouth with a rather unsteady hand.

"Knows? — knows what?" said Betty. There was a pink flush, perhaps of alarm, on her pretty cheek, but her eyes said plainly that if there were risks she must run them.

Naseby hesitated. The natural reticence of one young man about another held him back — and he was Ancoats's friend. But he liked Lady Madeleine, and her mother's ugly manœuvres in the sight of gods and men filled him with a restless ill-temper.

"You say the Maxwells have told you nothing?" he said at last. "But all the same I am pretty certain that Maxwell is here for nothing else. What on earth should he be doing in this *galère* just now! Look at him and Fontenoy! They've been pacing that lime-walk for a good hour. No one ever saw such a spectacle before. Of course something's up!"

Betty followed his eyes, and caught the figures of the two men between the trunks as they moved through the light and shadow of the lime-walk — Fontenoy's massive head sunk in his shoulders, his hands clasped behind his back; Maxwell's taller and alerter form beside him. Fontenoy had, in fact, arrived that morning from town, just too late to accompany Mrs. Allison and her flock to church; and Maxwell and he had been together since the moment when Ancoats, having brought his guest into the garden, had gone off himself on a walk with Tressady.

"Ancoats and Tressady came back past here," Naseby went on. "Ancoats stood still, with his hands on his sides, and looked at those two. His expression was not amiable. 'Something hatching,' he said to Tressady. I suppose Ancoats got his sneer from his actor-friends — none of us could do it without practice. 'Shall we go and pull the chief out of that?' But they didn't go. Ancoats turned sulky, and went into the house by himself."

"I'm glad I don't have to keep that youth straight," said Betty, devoutly. "Perhaps I don't care enough about him to try. But his mother's a darling saint! — and if he breaks her heart he ought to be hung."

"She knows nothing — I believe —" said Naseby, quickly.

"Strange!" cried Betty. "I wonder if it pays to be a saint. I shall know everything about *my* boy when he's that age."

"Oh! will you?" said Naseby, looking at her with a mocking eye.

"Yes, sir, I shall. Your secrets are not so difficult to know, if one *wants* to know them. Heaven forbid, however, that I should want to know anything about any of you till Bertie is grown up! Now, please tell me everything. Who is the lady?"

"Heaven forbid I should tell you!" said Naseby, drily.

"Don't trifle any more," said Betty, laying a remonstrating hand on his arm; "they will be home from church directly."

"Well, I won't tell you any names," said Naseby, reluctantly. "Of course, it's an actress — a very

small one. And, of course, she's a bad lot — and pretty."

"Why, there's no of course about it — about either of them!" said Betty, with more indignation than grammar. She also had dramatic friends, and was sensitive on the point.

Naseby protested that if he must argue the ethics of the stage before he told his tale, the tale would remain untold. Then Betty, subdued, fell into an attitude of meek listening, hands on lap. The tale when told indeed proved to be a very ordinary affair, marked out perhaps a trifle from the ruck by the facts that there was another pretender in the field with whom Ancoats had already had one scene in public, and would probably have more; that Ancoats being Ancoats, something mad and conspicuous was to be expected, which would bring the matter inevitably to his mother's ears; and that Mrs. Allison was Mrs. Allison.

"Can he marry her?" said Betty, quickly.

"Thank Heaven! no. There is a husband somewhere in Chili. So that it doesn't seem to be a question of driving Mrs. Allison out of Castle Luton. But — well, between ourselves, it would be a pity to give Ancoats so fine a chance of going to the bad, as he'll get, if this young woman lays hold of him. He mightn't recover it."

Betty sat silent a moment. All her gaiety had passed away. There was a fierceness in her blue eyes.

"And that's what we bring them up for!" she exclaimed at last — "that they may do all these ugly, stale, stupid things over again. Oh! I'm not think-

ing so much of the morals!" — she turned to Naseby with a defiant look. "I am thinking of the hateful cruelty and unkindness!"

"To his mother?" said Naseby. He shrugged his shoulders.

Betty allowed herself an outburst. Her little hand trembled on her knee. Naseby did not reply. Not that he disagreed; far from it. Under his young and careless manner he was already a person of settled character, cherishing a number of strong convictions. But since it had become the fashion to talk as frankly of a matter of this kind to your married-women friends as to anybody else, he thought that the women should take it with more equanimity.

Betty, indeed, regained her composure very quickly, like a stream when the gust has passed. They fell into a keen, practical discussion of the affair. Who had influence with Ancoats? What man? Naseby shook his head. The difference in age between Ancoats and Maxwell was too great, and the men too unlike in temperament. He himself had done what he could, in vain, and Ancoats now told him nothing; for the rest, he thought Ancoats had very few friends amid his innumerable acquaintance, and such as he had, of a third-rate dramatic sort, not likely to be of much use at this moment.

"I haven't seen him take to any fellow of his own kind as much as he has taken to George Tressady these two days, since he left Cambridge. But that's no good, of course — it's too new."

The two sat side by side, pondering. Suddenly Naseby said, smiling, with a change of expression:

"This party is really quite interesting. Look there!"

Betty looked, and saw George Tressady, with his hands in his pockets, lounging along a distant path beside Marcella Maxwell.

"Well!" said Betty, "what then?"

Naseby gave his mouth a twist.

"Nothing; only it's odd. I ran across them just now — I was playing ball with that jolly little imp, Hallin. You never saw two people more absorbed. Of course he's *sous le charme* — we all are. Our English politics are rather rum, aren't they? They don't indulge in this amiable country-house business in a South American republic, you know. They prefer shooting."

"And you evidently think it a healthier state of things. Wait till we come to something nearer to *our* hearths and bosoms than Factory Acts," said Betty, with the wisdom of her kind. "All the same, Lord Fontenoy is in earnest."

"Oh yes, Fontenoy is in earnest. So, I suppose, is Tressady. So — good Heavens! — is Maxwell. I say, here comes the church party."

And from a side-door in a venerable wall, beyond which could be seen the tower of a little church, there emerged a small group of people — Mrs. Allison, Lady Cathedine, and Madeleine Penley in front, escorted by the white-haired Sir Philip; and behind, Lady Tressady, between Harding Watton and Lord Cathedine.

"Cathedine!" cried Naseby, staring at the group. "Cathedine been to church?"

"For the purpose, I suppose, of disappointing poor

Laura, who might have hoped to get rid of him," said Betty, sharply. "No!—if I were Mrs. Allison I should draw the line at Lord Cathedine."

"Nobody need see any more of Cathedine than they want," said Naseby, calmly; "and, of course, he behaves himself here. Moreover, there is no doubt at all about his brains. They say Fontenoy expects to make great use of him in the Lords."

"By the way," said Betty, turning round upon him, "where are you?"

"Well, thank God! I'm not in Parliament," was Naseby's smiling reply. "So don't trouble me for opinions. I have none. Except that, speaking generally, I should like Lady Maxwell to get what she wants."

Betty threw him a sly glance, wondering if she might tease him about the news she heard of him from Marcella.

She had no time, however, to attack him, for Mrs. Allison approached.

"What is the matter with her?—with Madeleine?—with all of them?" thought Betty, suddenly.

For Mrs. Allison, pale and discomposed, did not return, did not apparently notice Lady Leven's greeting. She walked hastily past them, and would have gone at once into the house but that, turning her head, she perceived Lord Fontenoy hurrying towards her from the lime-walk. With an obvious effort she controlled herself, and went to meet him, leaning heavily on her silver-topped stick.

The others paused, no one having, as it seemed,

anything to say. Letty poked the gravel with her parasol; Sir Philip made a telescope of his hands, and fixed it upon Maxwell, who was coming slowly across the lawn; while Lady Madeleine turned a handsome, bewildered face on Betty.

Betty took her aside to look at a flower on the house.

"What's the matter?" said Lady Leven, under her breath.

"I don't know," said the other. "Something dreadful happened on the way home. There was a girl—"

But she broke off suddenly. Ancoats had just opened and shut the garden-door, and was coming to join his guests.

"Poor dear!" thought Betty to herself, with a leap of pity. It was so evident the girl's whole nature thrilled to the approaching step. She turned her head towards Ancoats, as though against her will, her tall form drawn erect, in unconscious tension.

Ancoats's quick eyes ran over the group.

"He thinks we have been talking about him," was Betty's quick reflection, which was probably not far from the truth. For the young man's face at once assumed a lowering expression, and, walking up to Lady Tressady, whom as yet he had noticed no more than civility required, he asked whether she would like to see the "houses" and the rose-garden.

Letty, delighted by the attention, said Yes in her gayest way, and Ancoats at once led her off. He walked quickly, and their figures soon disappeared among the trees.

Madeleine Penley gazed after them. Betty, who had a miserable feeling that the girl was betraying herself to men like Harding Watton or Lord Cathedine, — a feeling which was, however, the creation of her own nervous excitement, — tried to draw her away. But Lady Madeleine did not seem to understand. She stood mechanically buttoning and unbuttoning her long gloves. "Yes, I'm coming," she said, but she did not move.

Then Betty saw that Lord Naseby had approached her; and it seemed to the observer that all the young man's vivid face was suffused with something at once soft and fierce.

"The thorn-blossom on the hill is a perfect show just now, Lady Madeleine," he said. "Come and look at it. There will be just time before lunch."

The girl looked at him. The colour rushed to her cheeks, and she walked submissively away beside him.

Meanwhile Letty and Ancoats pursued their way towards the greenhouses and walled gardens. Letty tripped along, hardly able to keep up with her companion's stride, but chattering fast all the time. At every turn of the view she overflowed with praise and wonder; nor could anything have been at once more enthusiastic or more impertinent than the questions with which she plied him as to his gardeners, his estate, and his affairs, in the intervals of panegyric.

Ancoats at first hardly listened to her. A perfunctory "Yes" or "No" seemed to be all that the situa-

tion demanded. Then, when he did sufficiently emerge from the tempest of his own thoughts to catch some of the things she was saying, his irritable temper rebelled at once. What had Tressady been about? — ill-bred, tiresome woman!

His manner stiffened; he stalked along in front of her, doing his bare host's duty, and warding off her conversation as much as possible; while Letty, on her side, soon felt the familiar chill and mortification creeping over her. Why, she wondered angrily, should he have asked her to walk with him if he could not be a more agreeable companion?

Towards the end of the lime-walk they came across Mrs. Allison and Lord Fontenoy. As they passed the older pair the pale mother lifted her eyes to her son with a tremulous smile.

But Ancoats made no response, nor had he any greeting for Fontenoy. He carried his companion quickly on, till they found themselves in a wilderness of walled gardens opening one into another, each, as it seemed, more miraculously ordered and more abundantly stocked than its neighbour.

"I wonder you know your way," laughed Letty. "And who can possibly consume all this?"

"I haven't an idea," said Ancoats, abruptly, as he opened the door of the tenth vinery. "I wish you'd tell me."

Letty raised her eyebrows with a little cry of protest.

"Oh! but it makes the whole place so magnificent, so complete."

"What is there magnificent in having too much?"

said Ancoats, shortly. "I believe the day of these huge country places, with all their dull greenhouses and things, is done."

Much he cared, indeed, about his gardeners and his grapes! He was in the mood to feel his whole inheritance a burden round his neck. But at the same time to revile his own wealth gave him a pungent sense of playing the artist.

"Have you argued that with Lord Fontenoy?" she inquired archly.

"I should not take the trouble," he said, with careless hauteur. "Ah!" — Letty's vanity winced under his involuntary accent of relief — "I see your husband and Lady Maxwell."

Marcella and George came towards them. They were strolling along a broad flowery border, which was at the moment a blaze of pæonies of all shades, interspersed with tall pyramidal growths of honeysuckle. Marcella was loitering here and there, burying her face in the fragrance of the honeysuckle, or drawing her companion's attention in delight to the glowing clumps of pæonies. Hallin hovered round them, now putting his hand confidingly into Tressady's, now tugging at his mother's dress, and now gravely wooing the friendship of a fine St. Bernard that made one of the party. George, with his hands in his pockets, walked or paused as the others chose; and it struck Letty at once that he was talking with unusual freedom and zest.

Yes, it was true, indeed, as Harding said — they had made friends. As she looked at them the first movement of a jealous temper stirred in Letty. She

was angry with Lady Maxwell's beauty, and angry with George's enjoyment. It was like the great lady all over to slight the wife and annex the husband. George certainly might have taken the trouble to come and look for her on their return from church!

So, while Ancoats talked stiffly with Marcella, the bride, a few paces off, let George understand through her bantering manner that she was out of humour.

"But, dear, I had no notion you would be let out so soon," pleaded George. "That good man really can't earn his pay."

"Oh! but of course you knew it was High Church —all split up into little bits," said Letty, unappeased. "But naturally — "

She was about to add some jealous sarcasm when it was arrested by the arrival of Sir Philip Wentworth and Watton, whose figures appeared in a side-archway close to her.

"Ah! well guessed," said Sir Philip. "I thought we should find you among the pæonies. Lady Tressady, did you ever see such a show? Ancoats, is your head gardener visible on a Sunday? I ask with trembling, for there is no more magnificent member of creation. But if I *could* get at him, to ask him about an orchid I saw in one of your houses yesterday, I should be grateful."

"Come into the next garden, then," said Ancoats, "where the orchid-houses are. If he isn't there, we'll send for him."

"Then, Lady Tressady, you must come and see me through," said Sir Philip, gallantly. "I want to quarrel with him about a label — and you remember Dizzy's

saying — 'a head gardener is always opinionated'? Are you coming, Lady Maxwell?"

Marcella shook her head, smiling.

"I am afraid I hate hothouses," she said.

"My dear lady, don't pine for the life according to nature at Castle Luton!" said Sir Philip, raising a finger. "The best of hothouses, like the best of anything, demands a thrill."

Marcella shrugged her shoulders.

"I get more thrill out of the pæonies."

Sir Philip laughed, and he and Watton carried off Letty, whose vanity was once more happy in their society; while Ancoats, glad of the pretext, hurried along in front to find the great Mr. Newmarch.

"I believe there are some wonderful irises out in the Friar's Garden," said Marcella. "Mrs. Allison told me there was a show of them somewhere. Let me see if I can find the way. And Hallin would like the goldfish in the fountain."

Her two companions followed her gladly, and she led them through devious paths till there was a shout from Hallin, and the most poetic corner of a famous garden revealed itself. Amid the ruins of a cloister that had once formed part of the dissolved Cistercian priory on whose confiscated lands Castle Luton had arisen, a rich medley of flowers was in full and perfect bloom. Irises in every ravishing shade of purple, lilac, and gold, carpets of daffodils and narcissus, covered the ground, and ran into each corner and cranny of the old wall. Yellow banksia and white clematis climbed the crumbling shafts, or made new tracery for

the empty windows, and where the rain ended, yew hedges, adorned at top with a whole procession of birds and beasts, began. The flowery space thus enclosed was broken in the centre by an old fountain; and as one sat on a stone seat beside it, one looked through an archway, cut through the darkness of the yews, to the blue river and the hills.

The little place breathed perfume and delight. But Marcella did not, somehow, give it the attention it deserved. She sat down absently on the bench by the fountain, and presently, as George and Hallin were poking among the goldfish, she turned to her companion with the abrupt question:

"You didn't know Ancoats, I think, before this visit, did you?"

"Only as one knows the merest acquaintance. Fontenoy introduced me to him at the club."

Marcella sighed. She seemed to be arguing something with herself. At last, with a quick look towards the approaches of the garden, she said in a low voice:

"I think you must know that his friends are not happy about him?"

It so happened that Watton had found opportunity to show Tressady that morning a paragraph from one of the numerous papers that batten on the British peer, his dress, his morals, and his sport. The paragraph, without names, without even initials, contained an outline of Lord Ancoats's affairs which Harding, who knew everything of a scandalous nature, declared to be well informed. It had made George whistle; and afterwards he had watched Mrs. Allison go to church with a new interest in her proceedings.

So that when Marcella threw out her hesitating question, he said at once:

"I know what the papers are beginning to say — that is, I have seen a paragraph —"

"Oh! those newspapers!" she said in distress. "We are all afraid of some madness, and any increase of talk may hasten it. There is no one who can control him, and of late he has not even tried to conceal things."

"It is a determined face," said George. "I am afraid he will take his way. How is it that he comes to be so unlike his mother?"

"How is it that adoration and sacrifice count for so little?" said Marcella, sadly. "She has given him all the best of her life."

And she drew a rapid sketch of the youth's career and the mother's devotion.

George listened in silence. What she said showed him that in his conversations with Ancoats that young man had been talking round and about his own case a good deal! and when she paused he said drily:

"Poor Mrs. Allison! But, you know, there must be some crumples in the rose-leaves of the great."

She looked at him with a momentary astonishment.

"Why should one think of her as 'great'? Would not any mother suffer? First of all he is so changed; it is so difficult to get at him — his friends are so unlike hers — he is so wrapped up in London, so apathetic about his estate. All the religious sympathy that meant so much to her is gone. And now he threatens her with this — what shall I call it?" — her lip curled — "this entanglement. If it goes on, how

shall we keep her from breaking her heart over it? Poor thing! poor mothers!"

She raised her white hand, and let it fall upon her knee with one of the free, instinctive gestures that made her beauty so expressive.

But George would not yield himself to her feeling.

"Ancoats will get through it — somehow — as other men do," he said stubbornly, "and she must get through it too — and *not* break her heart."

Marcella was silent. He turned towards her after a moment.

"You think that a brutal doctrine? But if you'll let me say it, life and ease and good temper are really not the brittle things women make them! Why do they put all their treasure into that one bag they call their affections? There is plenty else in life — there is indeed! It shows poverty of mind!"

He laughed, and taking up a pebble dropped it sharply among the goldfish.

"Alack!" said Marcella, caressing her child's head as he stood playing beside her. "Hallin, I can't have you kiss my hand like that. Sir George says it's poverty of mind."

"It ain't," said Hallin, promptly. But his remark had a deplorable lack of unction, for the goldfish, startled by George's pebble, were at that moment performing evolutions of the greatest interest, and his black eyes were greedily bent upon them.

Both laughed, and George let her remark alone. But his few words left on Marcella a painful impression, which renewed her compassion of the night before. This young fellow, just married, protesting

against an over-exaltation of the affections! — it struck her as half tragic, half grotesque. And, of course, it was explained by the idiosyncrasies of that little person in a Paris gown now walking about somewhere with Sir Philip!

Yet, just as she had again allowed herself to think of him as someone far younger and less mature than herself, he quietly renewed the conversation, so far as it concerned Ancoats, talking with a caustic good sense, a shrewd perception, and at bottom with a good feeling, that first astonished her, and then mastered her friendship more and more. She found herself yielding him a fuller and fuller confidence, appealing to him, taking pleasure in anything that woke the humour of the sharp, long face, or that rare blink of the blue eyes that meant a leap of some responsive sympathy he could not quite conceal.

And for him it was all pleasure, though he never stopped to think of it. The lines of her slender form, as she sat with such careless dignity beside him, her lovely eyes, the turns of her head, the softening tones of her voice, the sense of an emerging bond that had in it nothing ignoble, nothing to be ashamed of, together with the child's simple liking for him, and the mere physical delight of this morning of late May — the rush and splendour of its white, thunderous clouds, its penetrating, scented air: each and all played their part in the rise of a new emotion he would not have analysed if he could.

He was particularly glad that in this fresh day of growing intimacy she had as yet talked politics or "questions" of any sort so little! It made it all the

more possible to escape from, to wholly overthrow in his mind, that first hostile image of her, impressed — strange unreason on his part! — by that first meeting with her in the crowd round the injured child, and in the hospital ward. Had she started any subject of mere controversy he would have held his own as stoutly as ever. But so long as she let them lie, *herself*, the woman, insensibly argued for her, and wore down his earlier mood.

So long, indeed, as he forgot Maxwell's part in it all! But it was not possible to forget it long. For the wife's passion, in spite of a noble reticence, shone through her whole personality in a way that alternately touched and challenged her new friend. No; let him remember that Maxwell's ways of looking at things were none the less pestilent because *she* put them into words.

After luncheon Betty Leven found herself in a corner of the Green Drawing-room. On the other side of it Mrs. Allison and Lord Fontenoy were seated together, with Sir Philip Wentworth not far off. Lord Fontenoy was describing his week in Parliament. Betty, who knew and generally shunned him, raised her eyebrows occasionally, as she caught the animated voice, the queer laughs, and fluent expositions, which the presence of his muse was drawing from this most ungainly of worshippers. His talk, indeed, was one long invocation; and the little white-haired lady in the armchair was doing her best to play Melpomene. Her speech was very soft. But it made for battle; and Fontenoy was

never so formidable as when he was fresh from Castle Luton.

Betty's thoughts, however, had once more slipped away from her immediate neighbours, and were pursuing more exciting matters, — the state of Madeleine Penley's heart and the wiles of that witch-woman in London, who must be somehow plucked like a burr from Ancoats's skirts, — when Marcella entered the room, hat in hand.

"Whither away, fair lady?" cried Betty; "come and talk to me."

"Hallin will be in the river," said Marcella, irresolute.

"If he is, Sir George will fish him out. Besides, I believe Sir George and Ancoats have gone for a walk, and Hallin with them. I heard Maxwell tell Hallin he might go."

Marcella turned an uncertain look upon Lord Fontenoy and Mrs. Allison. But directly Maxwell's wife entered the room, Maxwell's enemy had dropped his talk of political affairs, and he was now showing Sir Philip a portfolio of Mrs. Allison's sketches, with a subdued ardour that brought a kindly smile to Marcella's lip. In general, Fontenoy had neither eye nor ear for anything artistic; moreover, he spoke barbarous French, and no other European tongue; while of letters he had scarcely a tincture. But when it became a question of Mrs. Allison's accomplishments, her drawing, her embroidery, still more her admirable French and excellent Italian, the books she had read, and the poetry she knew by heart, he was all appreciation — one might almost say, all

feeling. It was Cymon and Iphigenia in a modern and middle-aged key.

His mien he fashioned and his tongue he filed.

And did a blunder come, Iphigenia gently and deftly put it to rights.

"Where is Madeleine?" asked Betty, as Marcella approached her sofa.

"Walking with Lord Naseby, I think."

"What was the matter on the way from church?" asked Betty, in a low voice, raising her face to her friend.

Marcella looked gravely down upon her.

"If you come into the garden I will tell you. Madeleine told me."

Betty, all curiosity, followed her friend through the open window to a seat in the Dutch garden outside.

"It was a terrible thing that happened," said Marcella, sitting erect, and speaking with a manner of suppressed energy that Betty knew well; "one of the things that make my blood boil when I come here. You know how she rules the village?" — She turned imperceptibly towards the distant drawing-room, where Mrs. Allison's white head was still visible. "Not only must all the cottages be beautiful, but all the people must reach a certain standard of virtue. If a man drinks, he must go; if a girl loses her character, she and her child must go. It was such a girl that threw herself in the way of the party this morning. Her mother would not part with her; so the decree went forth — the whole family must go. They

say the girl has never been right in her head since the baby's birth; she raved and wept this morning, said her parents could find no work elsewhere — they must die, she and her child must die. Mrs. Allison tried to stop her, but couldn't; then she hurriedly sent the others on, and stayed behind herself — only for a minute or two; she overtook Madeleine almost immediately. Madeleine is sure she was inexorable; so am I; she always is. I once argued with her about a case of the kind — a *cruel* case! 'Those are the sins that make me *shudder!*' she said, and one could make no impression on her whatever. You see how exhausted she looks this afternoon. She will wear herself out, probably, praying and weeping over the girl."

Betty threw up her hands.

"My dear! — when she knows —"

"It may perfectly well kill her," said Marcella, steadily. Then, after a pause, Betty saw her face flush from brow to chin, and she added, in a low and passionate voice: "Nevertheless, from all tyrannies and cruelties in the name of Christ, good Lord, deliver us!"

The two lingered together for some time without speaking. Both were thinking of much the same things, but both were tired with the endless talking of a country-house Sunday, and the rest was welcome.

And presently Marcella rambled away from her friend, and spent an hour pacing by herself in a glade beside the river.

And there her mind instantly shook itself from

every care but one — the yearning over her husband and his work.

Two years of labour — she caught her breath with a little sob — labour which had aged and marked the labourer; and now, was it really to be believed, that after all the toil, after so much hope and promise of success, everything was to be wrecked at last?

She gave herself once more to eager forecasts and combinations. As to individuals — she recalled Tressady's blunt warning with a smile and a wince. But it did not prevent her from falling into a reverie of which he, or someone like him, was the centre. Types, incidents, scenes, rose before her — if they could only be pressed upon, *burnt into* such a mind, as they had been burnt into her mind and Maxwell's! That was the whole difficulty — lack of vision, lack of realisation. Men were to have the deciding voice in this thing, who had no clear conception of how poverty and misery live, no true knowledge of this vast tragedy of labour perpetually acted in our midst, no rebellion of heart against conditions of life for other men they themselves would die a thousand times rather than accept. She saw herself, in a kind of despair, driving such persons through streets, and into houses she knew, forcing them to look, and *feel*. Even now, at the last moment —

How much better she had come to know this interesting, limited being, George Tressady, during these twenty-four hours! She liked his youth, his sincerity — even the stubbornness with which he disclaimed inconvenient enthusiasms; and she was inevitably flattered by the way in which

his evident prejudice against herself had broken down.

His marriage was a misfortune, a calamity! She thought of it with the instinctive repulsion of one who has never known any temptation to the small vulgarities of life. One could have nothing to say to a little being like that. But all the more reason for befriending the man!

An hour or two later Tressady found himself strolling home along the flowery bank of the river. It was not long since he had parted from Lady Maxwell and Hallin, and on leaving them he had turned back for a while towards the woods on the hill, on the pretext that he wanted more of a walk. Now, however, he was hurrying towards the house, that there might be time for a chat with Letty before dressing. She would think he had been away too long. But he had proposed to take her on the river after tea, and she had preferred a walk with Lord Cathedine.

Since then — He looked round him at the river and the hills. There was a flush of sunset through the air, and the blue of the river was interlaced with rosy or golden reflections from a sky piled with stormy cloud and aglow with every "visionary majesty" of light and colour. The great cloud-masses were driving in a tragic splendour through the west; and hue and form alike, throughout the wide heaven, seemed to him to breathe a marvellous harmony and poetry, to make one vibrating "word" of beauty. Had some god suddenly gifted him with new senses and new eyes? Never had he felt so much joy in Nature, such a lift-

ing up to things awful and divine. Why? Because a beautiful woman had been walking beside him? — because he had been talking with her of things that he, at least, rarely talked of — realities of feeling, or thought, or memory, that no woman had ever shared with him before?

How had she drawn him to such openness, such indiscretions? He was half ashamed, and then forgot his discomfort in the sudden, eager glancing of the mind to the future, to the opportunities of the day just coming — for Mrs. Allison's party was to last till Whit Tuesday — to the hours and places in London where he was to meet her on those social errands of hers. What a warm, true heart! What a woman, through all her dreams and mistakes, and therefore how adorable!

He quickened his pace as the light failed. Presently he saw a figure coming towards him, emerging from the trees that skirted the main lawn. It was Fontenoy, and Fontenoy's supporter must needs recollect himself as quickly as possible. He had not seen much of his leader during the day. But he knew well that Fontenoy never forgot his *rôle*, and there were several points, newly arisen within the last forty-eight hours, on which he might have expected before this to be called to counsel.

But Fontenoy, when he came up with the wanderer, seemed to have no great mind for talk. He had evidently been pacing and thinking by himself, and when he was fullest of thought he was as a rule most silent and inarticulate.

"You are late; so am I," he said, as he turned back with Tressady.

George assented.

"I have been thinking out one or two points of tactics."

But instead of discussing them he sank into silence again. George let him alone, knowing his ways.

Presently he said, raising his powerful head with a jerk, "But tactics are not of such importance as they were. I think the thing is done — *done!*" he repeated with emphasis.

George shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. We may be too sanguine. It is not possible that Maxwell should be easily beaten."

Fontenoy laughed — a strange, high laugh, like a jay's, that seemed to have no relation to his massive frame, and died suddenly away.

"But we shall beat him," he said quietly; "and her, too. A well-meaning woman — but what a foolish one!"

George made no reply.

"Though I am bound to say," Fontenoy went on quickly, "that in private matters no man could be kinder and show a sounder judgment than Maxwell. And I believe Mrs. Allison feels the same with regard to her."

His look first softened, then frowned; and as he turned his eyes towards the house, George guessed what subject it was that he and Maxwell had discussed under the limes in the morning.

He found Letty in very good spirits, owing, as far as he could judge, to the civilities and attentions of

Lord Cathedine. Moreover, she was more at ease in her surroundings, and less daunted by Mrs. Allison.

"And of course, to-morrow," she said, as she put on her diamonds, "it will be nicer still. We shall all know each other so much better."

In her good-humour she had forgotten her twinge of jealousy, and did not even inquire with whom he had been wandering so long.

But Letty was disappointed of her last day at Castle Luton. For the party broke up suddenly, and by ten o'clock on Monday morning all Mrs. Allison's guests but Lord Fontenoy and the Maxwells had left Castle Luton.

It was on this wise.

After dinner on Sunday night Ancoats, who had been particularly silent and irritable at table, suddenly proposed to show his guests the house. Accordingly, he led them through its famous rooms and corridors, turned on the electric light to show the pictures, and acted cicerone to the china and the books.

Then, suddenly it was noticed that he had somehow slipped away, and that Madeleine Penley, too, was missing. The party straggled back to the drawing-room without their host.

Ancoats, however, reappeared alone in about half an hour. He was extremely pale, and those who knew him well, and were perforce observing him at the moment, like Maxwell and Marcella, drew the conclusion that he was in a state of violent though suppressed excitement. His mother, however, strange to say, noticed nothing. But she was clearly exhausted

and depressed, and she gave an early signal for the ladies' withdrawal.

The great house sank into quietness. But about an hour after Marcella and Betty had parted at Betty's door, Betty heard a quick knock, and opened it in haste.

"Mrs. Allison is ill!" said Marcella in a low, rapid voice. "I think everyone ought to go quite early to-morrow. Will you tell Frank? I am going to Lady Tressady. The gentlemen haven't come up."

Betty caught her arm. "Tell me —"

"Oh! my dear," cried Marcella, under her breath, "Ancoats and Madeleine had an explanation in his room. He told her everything — that child! She went to Mrs. Allison — he asked her to! Then the maid came for me in terror. It has been a heart-attack — she has often had them. She is rather better. But *do* let everybody go!" and she wrung her hands. "Maxwell and I must stay and see what can be done."

Betty flew to ring for her maid and look up trains. Lady Maxwell went on to Letty Tressady's room.

But on the way, in the half-dark passage, she came across George Tressady coming up from the smoking-room. So she gave her news of Mrs. Allison's sudden illness to him, begging him to tell his wife, and to convey their hostess's regrets and apologies for this untoward break-up of the party. It was the reappearance of an old ailment, she said, and with quiet would disappear.

George heard her with concern, and though his mind was active with conjectures, asked not a single question. Only, when she said good-night to him, he held her hand a friendly instant.

"We shall be off as early as possible, so it is good-bye. But we shall meet in town — as you suggested?"

"Please!" she said, and hurried off.

But just as he reached his own door, he turned with a long breath towards the passage where he had just seen her. It seemed that he saw her still — her white face and dress, the trouble and pity under her quiet manner, her pure sweetness and dignity. He said to himself, with a sort of pride, that he had made a friend, a friend whose sympathy, whose heart and mind, he was now to explore.

Who was to make difficulties? Letty? But already as he stood there, with his hand upon the handle of her door, his mind, in a kind of flashing dream, was already making division of his life between the woman he had married with such careless haste and this other, who at highest thought of him with a passing kindness, and at lowest regarded him as a mere pawn in the political game.

What could he win by this friendship, that would injure Letty? Nothing! absolutely nothing.

END OF VOL. I

The Story of Bessie Costrell.

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

16mo. Cloth. 75 cents.

"It is the best work Mrs. Ward has done." — *Philadelphia Press.*

"Mrs. Ward's new story is one of the daintiest little gems I have come across in my weekly literary hunts." — ALAN DALE in *New York World.*

"The piece of fiction under consideration is the best short story presented in many years, if not in a decade; presented so thrillingly and graphically, we cannot avoid pronouncing this short tale a masterpiece." — *Elmira Telegram.*

"Every one who did not follow the story as it came out in the magazine will be glad of its appearance in book form, and it will find a wide reading, not only for the interest and originality of the story, but for the curiosity of seeing the author in an entirely new vein. As it stands completed, it bears the unmistakable mark of an artist's hands, in every way a remarkably human and life-like portraiture, which will take its place as a small but brilliant gem in the distinguished author's literary crown." — *Boston Courier.*

"Every page shows it to be the work of an artist. The observations of the trained eye, the touches of the skilled writer, are all there, and what I like in the story is, that no words are wasted in the telling. . . . The interest is too strong for one to lay the book down until it is finished. Mrs. Ward has never written anything more dramatic than this story; the agony of old John over his loss, the tragedy of Bessie's end, thrill the reader as few stories succeed in doing, though many of them make greater efforts." — *New York World.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

MARCELLA.

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

WITH A NEW PHOTOGRAVURE PORTRAIT.

In two volumes, small 12mo, bound in polished buckram, in box, price, $2.00; also in one volume, 12mo, cloth, $1.00; and in paper covers, 50 cents.

"The task undertaken in producing 'Marcella' was worthy, in magnitude and in interest, of the hand . . . that gave us 'Robert Elsmere' and traced the 'History of David Grieve.' . . . The whole impression left after reading 'Marcella' from beginning to end is remarkable for the number of highly finished pictures fixed in the mind of the reader — pictures of which he cannot but feel sure that they are at once true to life and typical of life. And those two conditions are rarely satisfied by any pictures whatsoever, whether drawn or written. . . . There are scenes of cottage life in the book which have probably never been outdone in clean accuracy of observation or in brilliancy of literary finish. . . . It is a sign of the book's worth that one is in earnest with Marcella. . . . No man could have drawn such a character successfully, and few would have been bold enough to attempt it. No one but Mrs. Ward herself could tell us whether she has in this instance done what she meant to do. . . . Whatever her own ideal may have been, the attempt to reach it has given us a very remarkable and complete piece of work, embodying a startling picture of modern England, which we Americans must accept, however reluctantly, as true, but which we shall have no reluctance at all in admiring sincerely for its breadth, its feeling, and the consummate detail of its execution." — MR. F. MARION CRAWFORD in *Book Reviews*.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

ROBERT ELSMERE.

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

12mo. Cloth. $1.00.

"The strength of the book seems to lie in an extraordinary wealth of diction, never separated from thought; in a close and searching faculty of social observation; in generous appreciation of what is morally good, impartially exhibited in all directions; above all, in the sense of mission with which the writer is evidently possessed, and in the earnestness and persistency of purpose with which through every page and line it is pursued. The book is eminently an offspring of the time, and will probably make a deep, or at least a very sensible, impression; not, however, among mere novel-readers, but among those who share, in whatever sense, the deeper thought of the period." — MR. GLADSTONE in the *Nineteenth Century*.

"Comparable in sheer intellectual power to the best works of George Eliot. . . . Unquestionably one of the most notable works of fiction that has been produced for years." — *The Scotsman*.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE.

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

12mo. Cloth. $1.00. In paper covers, 50 cents.

"We have been under the spell of this book, and must acknowledge its power as a romance. The pulse of genius throbs in it and the glamour of great imagination plays over it." — *The Independent.*

"Mrs. Ward has shown herself to be a writer of incontestable genius. Her high enthusiasm for the moral elevation of the race has been at one with the artistic impulse that guided her pen. . . . Her delineation of the development of David Grieve's character by many will be thought unsurpassed for insight and delicacy of handling by anything in her earlier book, 'Robert Elsmere.'" — *Boston Times.*

"She has, to sum up many things in a sentence, that indefinable and irresistible charm which the best writers among women have, and the best writers among men never have, or almost never." — *New York Tribune.*

"It is a book to keep by one and read in detached passages, for its illumination on the higher conduct of living; and great as it is as a novel, its greatest usefulness is that of a new and diviner commentary on human life." — *Boston Budget.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

THE JOURNAL INTIME OF HENRI-FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL.

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

A reprint of the second English edition, with passages from the enlarged fifth French edition, and a topical index.

New and Cheaper Edition, 12mo, $1.00. Also in two volumes, 18mo, gilt top, $1.50.

"A minute and marvellous, though unstudied, chronicle of mental impressions, the publication of which was an event in the history of literature, and has insured his name an immortality that might have escaped the most finished conscious performance within the limit of his powers. . . . A superb constructive edifice of thought, exuberant with inspiration and animating impulse and suggestiveness, seething with intense intellectual passion and illumined withal by a sublime glow of love and submissive faith." — *Commercial Advertiser.*

"A wealth of thought and a power of expression which would make the fortune of a dozen less able works." — *Churchman.*

"A work of wonderful beauty, depth, and charm. . . . Will stand beside such confessions as St. Augustine's and Pascal's. . . . It is a book to converse with again and again; fit to stand among the choicest volumes that we esteem as friends of our souls." — *Christian Register.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

Summer in Arcady.

A TALE OF NATURE.

BY

JAMES LANE ALLEN,

Author of "A Kentucky Cardinal," "Aftermath," "The Blue Grass Region of Kentucky," "John Gray," etc.

16mo. Cloth. $1.25.

"'Summer in Arcady' is aglow with all the well-known charm of Mr. Allen's delineative and narrative powers, and one reads the story with a breathless human interest to the very end." — *The Chicago Tribune.*

"This story by James Lane Allen is one of the gems of the season. It is artistic in its setting, realistic and true to nature and life in its descriptions, dramatic, pathetic, tragic in its incidents; indeed, a veritable gem that must become classic. It is difficult to give an outline of the story; it is one of the stories which do not outline; it must be read." — *Boston Daily Advertiser.*

"'Summer in Arcady' is a brilliant addition to American fiction, and will convince the few skeptics that remain in England that American literature, even in this department, is fresh, powerful, and engaging." — *Chicago Times Herald.*

"The close communion and sympathy with Nature, and the noble interpretation of her wayward moods and changing phases, manifested in 'A Kentucky Cardinal' and 'Aftermath' find nobler, sweeter, ampler expression in the luminous sunlit, sun-flushed pages of his new story." — *The Bookman.*

"The book continually gladdens the æsthetic sense with its luxurious and chaste objective imagery. It shows a marked advance in the author's power of vivid dialogue, and though the nature of its materials will prevent its being called the most beautiful of his stories, it is yet likely to attain the widest circulation and to be a stepping-stone to higher things." — *The Chicago Tribune.*

"James Lane Allen has endeared himself to thousands of readers. A master of language, gifted with a true poetic temperament, a lover of humanity, and having high ideals for the art of writing as well as for the art of living, his pages reveal the deep, strong character, capable of keen insight, yet of sympathetic helpfulness, full of a strong and unusually appreciative love of nature and a spirit of good will and cheer that affords encouragement to weary men. Every book from his pen is a genuine fountain of life." — *The Hartford Post.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

The Daughter of a Stoic.

By CORNELIA ATWOOD PRATT.

12mo. Cloth. $1.25.

"From one end of the book to the other there is not a superfluous word, nor an ill-chosen one; yet you never feel, as occasionally happens in reading a cleverly written tale, that the characters are lacking in effect. . . . In dialogue, pure and simple, she need fear nothing from comparison with such masters of epigram as Anthony Hope and John Oliver Hobbes." *The Critic.*

"There is not a commonplace line in this unique and interesting novel. . . . It is a healthful book, not at all in accord with the average modern novel which makes passion king over body and soul." *The Lowell Times.*

"To those familiar with the author's short stories 'The Daughter of a Stoic' will bring the satisfaction of a fulfilled expectation. . . . The work is so artistically done that a second reading is really necessary to show its strength."—*St. Paul Globe.*

The Grey Lady.

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN.

Author of "With Edged Tools," "The Slave of the Lamp," etc.

12mo. Cloth. $1.25.

"Mr. H. S. Merriman's new novel is one of the best of the season, and will claim the undivided attention of the reader from beginning to end. Intensely dramatic: Mr. Merriman has done nothing better than this."—*Boston Daily Advertiser.*

"A very good story is told with great power and in a way to arrest the reader's attention from the first, and to hold it with increasing tension to the very end It is far above the average of novels, and is intrinsically strong and meritorious."—*Buffalo Commercial.*

"A story of unusual merit, both as a literary production and for the great strength of its character drawing. Some of its scenes are depicted with remarkable power. The story throughout is of very deep interest, and it will add to the author's reputation for constructive skill and originality." *Boston Home Journal.*

"'The Grey Lady' is a romantic story, one of the new ones from the presses of The Macmillan Company. The story is a pleasing one, and the work is most artistically bound in grey and green."—*Toledo Journal.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

Embarrassments.

By HENRY JAMES,

Author of "The Bostonians," "The Aspern Papers," "A London Life," "Partial Portrait."

12mo. Cloth. $1.50.

"Mr. Henry James has produced no more clever and subtle work than is to be found in his latest volume. . . . There are in these tales passages of splendid realism. The portrait of Geoffrey Dowling is a masterpiece of characterization. And there are sentences, unobtrusive asides, which flash with the brilliancy of true wit." — *New York Tribune.*

"Mr. James' writings are distinctively works of art. One and all of them appeal most strongly to cultivated minds. In no instance does he descend from his transcendent ideals of literature. An acquaintance with Henry James means an appreciation of the finer style of written English; and an inhalation of the atmosphere of purest English literature. No list of books for the summer will be complete without 'Embarrassments.'" — *Cambridge Press.*

A First Fleet Family.

A Hitherto Unpublished Narrative of Certain Remarkable Adventures Compiled from the Papers of Sergeant William Dew of the Marines.

By LOUIS BECKE and WALTER JEFFREY.

With Illustrations. 12mo. Cloth. $1.50.

"Has a capital subject for a novel of adventure, the voyage and early history of the first penal settlers in Australia. The author has accumulated a store of actual happenings which tell a pitiful and distressing tale." — *The Outlook.*

"Such an excellent contribution to current literature needs but little urging. In it history, adventure, and story are so delightfully intermingled that the book is sure to get itself read. Such books hold the reader far into the night." — *Boston Globe.*

"An ably written book giving in the form of a story an interesting account of the first deportation of convicts to Botany Bay. . . . Remarkably interesting, and in its manner often bears some resemblance to the style of Blackmore and Stevenson." — *Hartford Post.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

ADAM JOHNSTONE'S SON

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD,

Author of "Saracinesca," "Pietro Ghisleri," "Don Orsino," "Casa Braccio," etc.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. FORESTIER.

12mo. Cloth. $1.50.

"Admirers of F. Marion Crawford's works will be glad to read his latest book. . . . A bright book it is, and stamped with the author's individuality." — *New York Herald.*

"Every page of the narrative interests the reader, and the gradual separation of the tangled threads is most skilfully managed." — *Hartford Post.*

"The art is perfect and the tale is completed to a finish. The plot and the characters will engross one who sets about making their acquaintance." *Boston Courier.*

"If you doubt that it is a good story just read the first few chapters and then try to stop." — *Providence News.*

"It is not only one of the most enjoyable novels that Mr. Crawford has ever written, but it is a novel that will make people think." — *Boston Beacon.*

"Mr. F. Marion Crawford has never displayed greater deftness in telling a simple, straightforward love story in such a way as to rivet the reader's attention than in 'Adam Johnstone's Son.' The originality of the plot is singularly striking and bold. The few characters of the story are all drawn with admirable clearness, and the analysis of motive is keen and consistent. We think that none of Mr. Crawford's recent novels have been better adapted to please and interest a large circle of readers than this slight story." — *The Outlook.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

UNIFORM EDITION

OF THE WORKS OF

F. MARION CRAWFORD.

12mo. Cloth. Price $1.00 per volume.

KATHARINE LAUDERDALE.

The first of a series of novels dealing with New York life.

"Mr. Crawford at his best is a great novelist, and in 'Katharine Lauderdale' we have him at his best." — *Boston Daily Advertiser.*

"A most admirable novel, excellent in style, flashing with humor, and full of the ripest and wisest reflections upon men and women." — *The Westminster Gazette.*

"It is the first time, we think, in American fiction that any such breadth of view has shown itself in the study of our social framework." — *Life.*

"It need scarcely be said that the story is skilfully and picturesquely written, portraying sharply individual characters in well-defined surroundings." — *New York Commercial Advertiser.*

"'Katharine Lauderdale' is a tale of New York, and is up to the highest level of his work. In some respects it will probably be regarded as his best. None of his works, with the exception of 'Mr. Isaacs,' shows so clearly his skill as a literary artist." — *San Francisco Evening Bulletin.*

PIETRO GHISLERI.

"The imaginative richness, the marvellous ingenuity of plot, the power and subtlety of the portrayal of character, the charm of the romantic environment, — the entire atmosphere, indeed, — rank this novel at once among the great creations." — *The Boston Budget.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

SARACINESCA.

"His highest achievement, as yet, in the realms of fiction. The work has two distinct merits, either of which would serve to make it great, — that of telling a perfect story in a perfect way, and of giving a graphic picture of Roman society in the last days of the pope's temporal power. . . . The story is exquisitely told." — *Boston Traveler.*

"One of the most engrossing novels we have ever read." *Boston Times.*

SANT' ILARIO.

A sequel to "Saracinesca."

"The author shows steady and constant improvement in his art. 'Sant' Ilario' is a continuation of the chronicles of the Saracinesca family. . . . A singularly powerful and beautiful story. . . . Admirably developed, with a naturalness beyond praise. . . . It must rank with 'Greifenstein' as the best work the author has produced. It fulfils every requirement of artistic fiction. It brings out what is most impressive in human action, without owing any of its effectiveness to sensationalism or artifice. It is natural, fluent in evolution, accordant with experience, graphic in description, penetrating in analysis, and absorbing in interest." — *New York Tribune.*

DON ORSINO.

A continuation of "Saracinesca" and "Sant' Ilario."

"The third in a rather remarkable series of novels dealing with three generations of the Saracinesca family, entitled respectively 'Saracinesca,' 'Sant' Ilario,' and 'Don Orsino,' and these novels present an important study of Italian life, customs, and conditions during the present century. Each one of these novels is worthy of very careful reading, and offers exceptional enjoyment in many ways, in the fascinating absorption of good fiction, in interest of faithful historic accuracy, and in charm of style. The 'new Italy' is strikingly revealed in 'Don Orsino.'" — *Boston Budget.*

"We are inclined to regard the book as the most ingenious of all Mr. Crawford's fictions. Certainly it is the best novel of the season." — *Evening Bulletin.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

WITH THE IMMORTALS.

"Altogether an admirable piece of art worked in the spirit of a thorough artist. Every reader of cultivated tastes will find it a book prolific in entertainment of the most refined description, and to all such we commend it heartily." — *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette.*

"The strange central idea of the story could have occurred only to a writer whose mind was very sensitive to the current modern thought and progress, while its execution, the setting it forth in proper literary clothing, could be successfully attempted only by one whose active literary ability should be fully equalled by his power of assimilative knowledge both literary and scientific, and no less by his courage and capacity for hard work. The book will be found to have a fascination entirely new for the habitual reader of novels. Indeed, Mr. Crawford has succeeded in taking his readers quite above the ordinary plane of novel interest." — *Boston Advertiser*

MARZIO'S CRUCIFIX.

"We take the liberty of saying that this work belongs to the highest department of character-painting in words." — *Churchman.*

"We have repeatedly had occasion to say that Mr. Crawford possesses in an extraordinary degree the art of constructing a story. His sense of proportion is just, and his narrative flows along with ease and perspicuity. It is as if it could not have been written otherwise, so naturally does the story unfold itself, and so logical and consistent is the sequence of incident after incident. As a story 'Marzio's Crucifix' is perfectly constructed." — *New York Commercial Advertiser.*

KHALED.

A Story of Arabia.

"Throughout the fascinating story runs the subtlest analysis, suggested rather than elaborately worked out, of human passion and motive, the building out and development of the character of the woman who becomes the hero's wife and whose love he finally wins, being an especially acute and highly finished example of the story-teller's art. . . . That it is beautifully written and holds the interest of the reader, fanciful as it all is, to the very end, none who know the depth and artistic finish of Mr. Crawford's work need be told." — *The Chicago Times.*

PAUL PATOFF.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

MR. ISAACS.

A Tale of Modern India.

"The writer first shows the hero in relation with the people of the East and then skilfully brings into connection the Anglo-Saxon race. It is in this showing of the different effects which the two classes of minds have upon the central figure of the story that one of its chief merits lies. The characters are original, and one does not recognize any of the hackneyed personages who are so apt to be considered indispensable to novelists, and which, dressed in one guise or another, are but the marionettes, which are all dominated by the same mind, moved by the same motive force. The men are all endowed with individualism and independent life and thought. . . . There is a strong tinge of mysticism about the book which is one of its greatest charms." — *Boston Transcript.*

"No story of human experience that we have met with since 'John Inglesant' has such an effect of transporting the reader into regions differing from his own. 'Mr Isaacs' is the best novel that has ever laid its scenes in our Indian dominions." — *The Daily News, London.*

DR. CLAUDIUS.

A True Story.

"There is a suggestion of strength, of a mastery of facts, of a fund of knowledge, that speaks well for future production. . . . To be thoroughly enjoyed, however, this book must be read, as no mere cursory notice can give an adequate idea of its many interesting points and excellences, for without a doubt 'Dr. Claudius' is the most interesting book that has been published for many months, and richly deserves a high place in the public favor." — *St. Louis Spectator.*

"To our mind it by no means belies the promises of its predecessor. The story, an exceedingly improbable and romantic one, is told with much skill: the characters are strongly marked without any suspicion of caricature, and the author's ideas on social and political subjects are often brilliant and always striking. It is no exaggeration to say that there is not a dull page in the book, which is peculiarly adapted for the recreation of student or thinker." — *Living Church.*

TO LEEWARD.

"A story of remarkable power." — *Review of Reviews.*

"Mr. Crawford has written many strange and powerful stories of Italian life, but none can be any stranger or more powerful than 'To Leeward,' with its mixture of comedy and tragedy, innocence and guilt." — *Cottage Hearth.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

A CIGARETTE-MAKER'S ROMANCE.

"It is a touching romance, filled with scenes of great dramatic power." — *Boston Commercial Bulletin.*

"It is full of life and movement, and is one of the best of Mr. Crawford's books." — *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette.*

"The interest is unflagging throughout. Never has Mr. Crawford done more brilliant realistic work than here. But his realism is only the case and cover for those intense feelings which, placed under no matter what humble conditions, produce the most dramatic and the most tragic situations. . . . This is a secret of genius, to take the most coarse and common material, the meanest surroundings, the most sordid material prospects, and out of the vehement passions which sometimes dominate all human beings to build up with these poor elements scenes and passages, the dramatic and emotional power of which at once enforce attention and awaken the profoundest interest." — *New York Tribune.*

GREIFENSTEIN.

"'Greifenstein' is a remarkable novel, and while it illustrates once more the author's unusual versatility, it also shows that he has not been tempted into careless writing by the vogue of his earlier books. . . . There is nothing weak or small or frivolous in the story. The author deals with tremendous passions working at the height of their energy. His characters are stern, rugged, determined men and women, governed by powerful prejudices and iron conventions, types of a military people, in whom the sense of duty has been cultivated until it dominates all other motives, and in whom the principle of 'noblesse oblige' is, so far as the aristocratic class is concerned, the fundamental rule of conduct. What such people may be capable of is startlingly shown." — *New York Tribune.*

A ROMAN SINGER.

"One of Mr. Crawford's most charming stories — a love romance pure and simple." — *Boston Home Journal.*

"'A Roman Singer' is one of his most finished, compact, and successful stories, and contains a splendid picture of Italian life." — *Toronto Mail.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

THE THREE FATES.

"The strength of the story lies in its portrayal of the aspirations, disciplinary efforts, trials, and triumphs of the man who is a born writer, and who, by long and painful experiences, learns the good that is in him and the way in which to give it effectual expression. The analytical quality of the book is excellent, and the individuality of each one of the very dissimilar three fates is set forth in an entirely satisfactory manner. . . . Mr. Crawford has manifestly brought his best qualities as a student of human nature and his finest resources as a master of an original and picturesque style to bear upon this story. Taken for all in all it is one of the most pleasing of all his productions in fiction, and it affords a view of certain phases of American, or perhaps we should say of New York, life that have not hitherto been treated with anything like the same adequacy and felicity." — *Boston Beacon.*

CHILDREN OF THE KING.

A Tale of Southern Italy.

"A sympathetic reader cannot fail to be impressed with the dramatic power of this story. The simplicity of nature, the uncorrupted truth of a soul, have been portrayed by a master-hand. The suddenness of the unforeseen tragedy at the last renders the incident of the story powerful beyond description. One can only feel such sensations as the last scene of the story incites. It may be added that if Mr. Crawford has written some stories unevenly, he has made no mistakes in the stories of Italian life. A reader of them cannot fail to gain a clearer, fuller acquaintance with the Italians and the artistic spirit that pervades the country." — M. L. B. in *Syracuse Journal.*

THE WITCH OF PRAGUE.

A Fantastic Tale.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. J. HENNESSY.

"'The Witch of Prague' is so remarkable a book as to be certain of as wide a popularity as any of its predecessors The keenest interest for most readers will lie in its demonstration of the latest revelations of hypnotic science. . . . It is a romance of singular daring and power." — *London Academy.*

"Mr. Crawford has written in many keys, but never in so strange a one as that which dominates 'The Witch of Prague.' . . . The artistic skill with which this extraordinary story is constructed and carried out is admirable and delightful. . . . Mr. Crawford has scored a decided triumph, for the interest of the tale is sustained throughout. . . . A very remarkable, powerful, and interesting story." — *New York Tribune.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

ZOROASTER.

"The field of Mr. Crawford's imagination appears to be unbounded. . . . In 'Zoroaster' Mr. Crawford's winged fancy ventures a daring flight. . . . Yet 'Zoroaster' is a novel rather than a drama. It is a drama in the force of its situations and in the poetry and dignity of its language; but its men and women are not men and women of a play. By the naturalness of their conversation and behavior they seem to live and lay hold of our human sympathy more than the same characters on a stage could possibly do." — *The Times.*

A TALE OF A LONELY PARISH.

"It is a pleasure to have anything so perfect of its kind as this brief and vivid story. . . . It is doubly a success, being full of human sympathy, as well as thoroughly artistic in its nice balancing of the unusual with the commonplace, the clever juxtaposition of innocence and guilt, comedy and tragedy, simplicity and intrigue." — *Critic.*

"Of all the stories Mr. Crawford has written, it is the most dramatic, the most finished, the most compact. . . . The taste which is left in one's mind after the story is finished is exactly what the fine reader desires and the novelist intends. . . . It has no defects. It is neither trifling nor trivial. It is a work of art. It is perfect." — *Boston Beacon.*

MARION DARCHE.

"Full enough of incident to have furnished material for three or four stories. . . . A most interesting and engrossing book. Every page unfolds new possibilities, and the incidents multiply rapidly." — *Detroit Free Press.*

"We are disposed to rank 'Marion Darche' as the best of Mr. Crawford's American stories." — *The Literary World.*

AN AMERICAN POLITICIAN.

THE NOVEL: What It Is.

18mo. Cloth. 75 Cents.

"When a master of his craft speaks, the public may well listen with careful attention, and since no fiction-writer of the day enjoys in this country a broader or more enlightened popularity than Marion Crawford, his explanation of 'The Novel: What It Is,' will be received with flattering interest." — *The Boston Beacon.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.